



THE INDEPENDENT

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Ho, ho, ho! Saddam gives Santa a visa

Santa Claus is coming to town. Baghdad, that is. Andrew Marshall hitches along on the Mother of All Sleigh Rides.

He has been on some tricky missions before, exploring the darker recesses of people's central heating systems, overdosing on dodgy sherry, covering the entire globe in one night aided only by a few grumpy elves. But this could be his toughest job yet. For Santa Claus is due to fly into Iraq on Christmas Day.

The visit has been cleared with the United Nations Sanctions Committee, and with the Iraqi authorities. It has been co-ordinated by an Icelandic charity, Peace 2000. Santa will be taking gifts, food and medicine for Iraqi children hit by UN sanctions since the 1990-91 Gulf War.

Thor Magnusson of Peace 2000, which is organising the trip, says that Santa is a non-political figure who can bring a message of peace and goodwill to Muslims and Christians alike. "We are also appealing for a peaceful solution in the Middle East, hoping that leaders will get together to stop the suffering of children," he said.

It is uncertain how this message will go down in Baghdad. Peace and goodwill have not exactly been seasonal favourites in Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Nor is he normally that comfortable with cheery bearded fellows. They look a little, well, Iranian, which is why most of Saddam's close colleagues choose a moustache only.

Despite Mr Magnusson's firm faith in Santa, he is apparently unhappy to rely on the traditional sleigh and reindeer. Instead, Peace 2000 has chartered a Russian cargo aircraft. The group said it still had to ensure that the plane would be in Reykjavik on time for Santa's planned takeoff on Wednesday.

"We think everything will work out, we're sorting out the final details," said Mr Magnusson. He told Reuters the Icelandic embassy in New York had said that a UN sanctions committee had approved the flight, despite severe restrictions on civilian aircraft over Iraq. Baghdad had also given approval, he added.

There is also a no-fly zone over southern and northern Iraq, policed by US fighters, which forbids all fixed-wing aircraft. It is unclear, according to the United Nations, whether this also covers reindeer-powered craft.

There was no word from Peace 2000 as to what, if anything, they had chosen to put into Saddam's stocking. (Tele-tubbies electric cattle prod? Spice Girl gas mask?) Saddam will, presumably, be spending the festive season with his family - or what is left of it; his close relatives have tended to come to unhappy ends.

*Twas the night before Christmas, and all through Baghdad,
The parents were sombre, the children were sad.
Festive spirit was missing. Alas and alack,
Santa Claus wasn't coming to visit Iraq.
For to north and to south was a tight no-fly zone,
So no Santa Claus for one nation alone.
But a kindly Iclander called Thor Magnusson,
Decided Iraq deserved some festive fun.
He called up Saddam, and the Sanctions Committee,
And for once everyone showed some heart and some pity.
They let him go in with some food and some toys
To bring some good cheer to the girls and the boys.
So Santa was cleared for his Middle East flight,
And he called to his reindeer outside in the night:
"Come Donner, come Blitzen, come Clinton and Bush!
Come Thatcher and Major!" And then, with a rush,
He took to the skies, in his special Stealth Sleigh,
And with full fighter escort, he went on his way.*

— Andrew Marshall



Streetlife: Pavement dwellers trying to keep warm in New Delhi yesterday. Bitter cold in northern India has killed 20 people, six in the city

Photograph: AP/Saurabh Das

IRA prisoners will leave Britain next month



TELEVISION The Eye, page 12
CROSSWORDS Page 28 and
The Eye, page 9
WEATHER The Eye, page 10
Web address: <http://www.independent.co.uk>

Seven IRA prisoners held in British jails are to be moved to the Irish Republic in a move which will please Sinn Féin but may increase Unionist disillusionment with the peace process. Our Ireland correspondent says the development follows yesterday's release on Christmas leave of Patrick Magee, serving life for the Brighton bombing



Patrick Magee leaves the Maze prison yesterday to start his 10 days' Christmas leave

Photograph: Brian Little

BY DAVID McKITTRICK

He was speaking as around 160 prisoners, including loyalists, republicans and others, were released over Christmas for 10 days, a longer period than usual. Among those released was Patrick Magee, who was jailed for life for the Brighton bomb attack which in 1984 killed five people at the Conservative Party conference and which narrowly missed assassinating Margaret Thatcher. He is among those who have already been transferred from England to Northern Ireland.

Republicans are by no means delighted with the pace of movement on the prison issue. They are pressing for the early release of all paramilitary prisoners, describing this as a confidence-building measure needed to underpin the IRA ceasefire. They have also criticised Dublin for assuring Lon-

don that transferred prisoners will continue to face their full sentences.

Loyalists are aggrieved, however, that in terms of prison concessions they regard republicans as being well ahead. Both sides are benefiting from the Christmas parole while both also qualify for the increased remission which was announced in 1995. But republicans have also benefited from early releases from prisons in the Irish Republic, as well as transfers of IRA prisoners from prisons in Britain to Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

There are no loyalist paramilitants held in prison in the Republic; if there were, Dublin would almost certainly agree to their speedy release. Similarly, there are no loyalists left in British jails who qualify for transfer to Northern Ireland.

This means that only republicans are benefiting from the recent relaxation in prison policy.

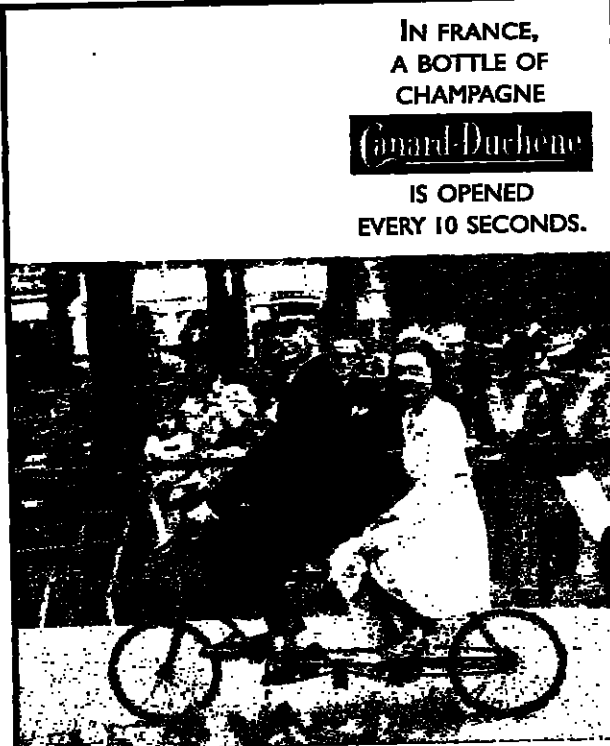
While loyalists do not necessarily disapprove of the transfers and releases in the Republic, they feel their prisoners are missing out. The feeling of alienation is compounded by events in the political arena such as the recent meeting in Downing Street between Tony Blair and the Sinn Féin president, Gerry Adams. Such developments are regarded as clear advances for republicans and therefore as unhelpful to the general loyalist cause.

The authorities will most immediately be concerned that the loyalist unrest might result in an outbreak of violence which could cost lives. Already this year loyalist violence has resulted in 11 deaths, compared to three killings by the IRA, and there is an ever-present danger that a rise in tension might produce a resort to the gun by either mainstream loyalist paramilitants or breakaway elements.

The other question is whether the Ulster Democratic party and the Progressive Unionists, the two political groupings which represent the main paramilitary groups, will attend the multi-party talks when they resume at Stormont on 12 January.

Ms Mowlam said yesterday that she was concerned at the announcement that UDA prisoners would review their attitude to their ceasefire. In a Christmas message, however, she declared: "I am confident that an agreement can be reached against a background of peace on both sides."

The UDP leader, Gary McMichael, who met Ms Mowlam yesterday, said afterwards: "There is a growing feeling within Unionism and loyalism that the Government is valuing the concerns of nationalism above those of loyalism and Unionism. There is a need for rapid movement on Ms Mowlam's part to try and retrieve this situation."



IN FRANCE,
A BOTTLE OF
CHAMPAGNE

Canard-Duchêne

IS OPENED
EVERY 10 SECONDS.



CANARD-DUCHÊNE. CHAMPAGNE SANS FORMALITÉ.

TODAY'S NEWS

MoD cries poverty over raises for low-paid staff

The Ministry of Defence is demanding a blanket exemption from having to pay the minimum wage to its staff. Despite spending £16bn on 232 Eurofighters, defence ministers are arguing that they cannot afford to upgrade the pay of 300 low-paid workers. Page 4

Calming influence

A health guide on how to keep your cool is the best-selling book this Christmas. The Little Book of Calm, by Paul Wilson, an Australian advertising executive, measures 3in by 4in and contains fewer than 1,000 words, yet it has sold 33,000 copies in the past week and is likely to end up as the top seller of the year. Page 6

Kids check out Santa

Children may soon be able to send a "gift list" to Santa by using a laser gun on the bar codes of toys. The Toys 'R Us chain has already adopted the idea at its 6,000 outlets in America and executives say it is likely to be introduced in Britain soon. Page 6

COLUMN ONE

Happy left gnome alone as garden thieves strike

It would be a sick and twisted mind that could ever accuse Happy of feeling Grumpy. But this Christmas the fairytale dwarf could be forgiven for at least feeling miserable.

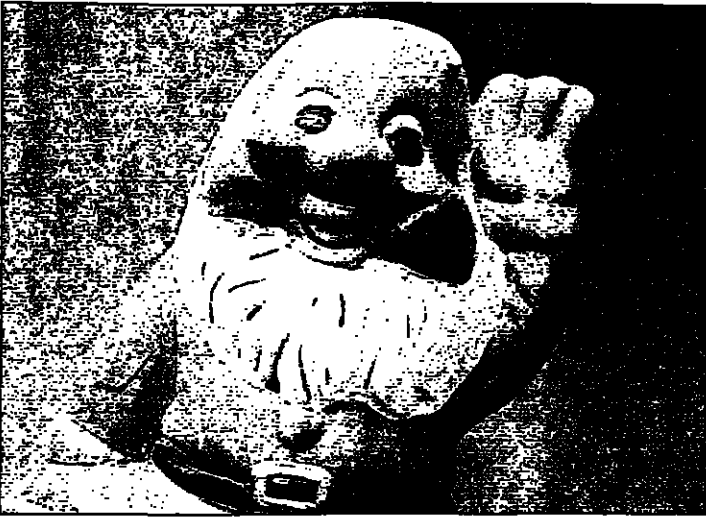
The 12-inch high gnome has been abandoned by Snow White and the other dwarves in a compelling disappearance act that has left police baffled and a Cheshire family grief-stricken.

Statuettes of Snow White, Grumpy, Sleepy, Dopey, Sneezy, Doc and Bashful went missing from the front garden of the Connor family home in Macclesfield last week. Wrecking the family's plans for a happy Christmas, the runaways then sent a card which read: "Missing you all at home, from Snow White and her six friends."

The problem for the Connors is that the card made no mention of whether the disappearance was voluntary - there is a shortage of panto characters in Cheshire this year - or whether they were kidnapped.

"At this stage, we just don't know, but I am hoping they will come home in time for Christmas," said David Connor, 44. "If you're reading this Snow White and the boys - please come home soon. We've re-named Happy, Lonely."

Helen Connor, 40, bought the gnomes 12 years ago for her daughter,



Feeling blue: Happy has been deserted by his gnome family

Sharon. Yesterday, Mrs Connor was taking the disappearance personally. "Obviously they thought they could get a better Christmas dinner somewhere else," she said. "At least Happy has stuck by me."

Cheshire constabulary said they were concerned that the dwarves might have been taken against their will. The arrival of the card almost caused a major incident room to be set up. "We thought it was a ransom note at first," said spokeswoman Brenda Cowling. "We're ho-ho-hoping they come back under their own steam."

The disappearance - and the police's willingness to join in the fun surrounding it - demonstrates an apparent lack of more serious crime over the holiday period. Many forces are reporting a quieter time than usual.

"Our crime press phone line is so empty that we've had to fill it with Christmas carols," said Ms Cowling. "At the moment, we're running - well, it had to be - 'Blue, Blue Christmas'."

If past form is anything to go by, the Connors can expect to receive many more cards from the missing gnomes. During the 1980s, there was a spate of gnome disappearances which were usually followed by postcards sent from around the world as the thieves visited various holiday destinations and wrote back as the missing gnomes.

On one occasion, however, the episode had a happy ending when the prodigal gnome returned, his face painted a tanned brown and a little suitcase, resplendent in stickers from around the world, stuck to his tiny little hand.

— Steve Boggan, Gnome Affairs Correspondent

TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.45	Italy (lira)	2,832
Austria (schillings)	20.20	Japan (yen)	24.38
Belgium (francs)	59.33	Malta (lira)	0.62
Canada (\$)	2.32	Netherlands (guilders)	3.23
Cyprus (pounds)	0.84	Norway (kroner)	11.84
Denmark (kroner)	11.02	Portugal (escudos)	291.30
France (francs)	9.61	Spain (pesetas)	242.88
Germany (marks)	2.88	Sweden (kroner)	12.65
Greece (drachmei)	456.63	Switzerland (francs)	2.33
Hong Kong (\$)	12.48	Turkey (lira)	326,048
Ireland (punts)	1.11	USA (\$)	1.62

Source: Thomas Cook
Rates for indication purposes only

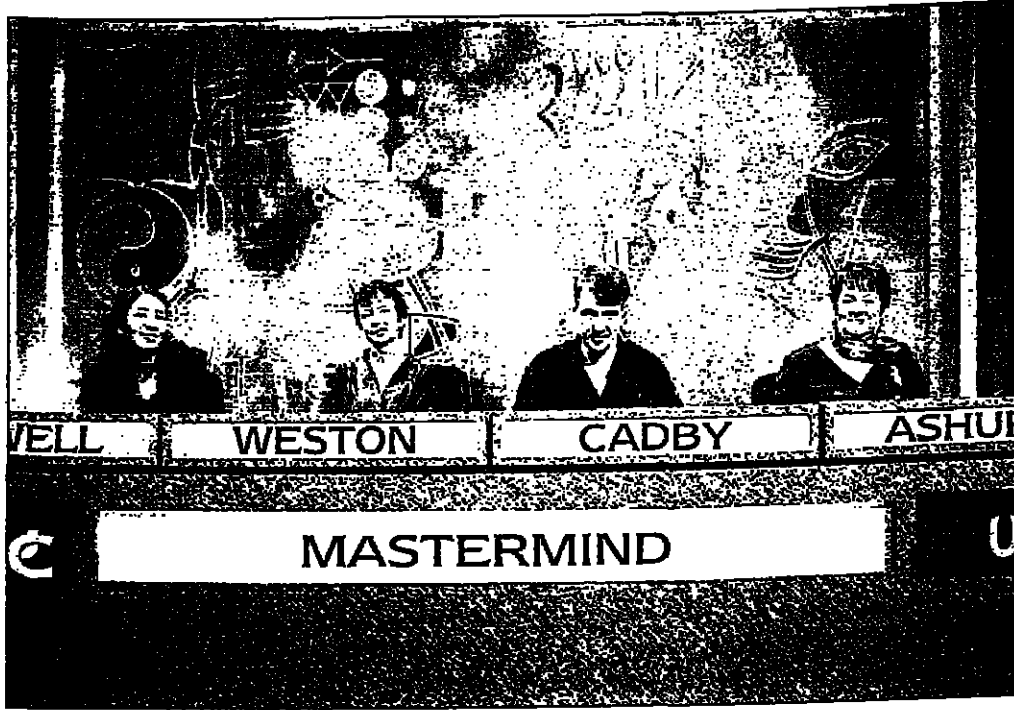
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NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING
Recycled paper made up 41.4% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1997.

PEOPLE



Brains trust: The Mastermind team on their way to defeat by Magdalen College, Oxford

Youth overcomes experience in quiz challenge

The University Challenge champions scored a victory for youth last night when they defeated a team of Mastermind finalists, proving that the decline in educational standards is greatly exaggerated.

In a closely fought contest Magdalen College, Oxford, reigning champions of University Challenge, beat the Masterminds by 260 points to 205.

The four students have a combined age of around 90, compared with over 170 for their four Mastermind opponents.

Their triumph over experience follows claims that today's students are not as bright as their predecessors. This suggestion was highlighted by the recent record-breaking defeat of New Hall College, Cambridge whose team achieved an all-time low score on University Challenge of 35 points.

It prompted suggestions that students in the Sixties and Seven-

STARTER FOR TEN

1: What is the name for the white mesocarp which lines the exocarp or rind of many citrus fruits?

2: Born in 1893, which American dancer and choreographer created the first modern dance technique to provide a significant alternative to classical ballet, which was intended to "reveal the inner man"?

Q: Which cathedral is unique among medieval English cathedrals in being planned as a single unit in the early English gothic style?

1: Pith, 2: Martha Graham, 3: Salisbury.

ties who battled for honours in the original series hosted by Bamber Gascoigne had broader and deeper general knowledge.

But in last night's showdown,

Magdalen's students, all from state secondary schools, stormed ahead to prove they were just as brainy as 1960s students.

Jim Adams, a maths and philosophy student, Colin Andress reading philosophy and ancient history, Gwyllim Thear reading English and Alison Reeves, a history student, trumped their opponents on questions from choreography to cathedrals.

The show's producer Peter Gwyn said: "By putting [Magdalen] against a formidable team of Mastermind finalists, I think we've demonstrated that the student population is as bright and as well-informed as ever."

The Mastermind team included the winner of the last ever series, Anne Ashurst, and finalists Clare Ockwell, Andrea Weston and Colin Cadby, the team's captain. The programme ended in September after 25 years.

Mandelson calls time on Dome stage spectacular

The theatrical impresario Sir Cameron Mackintosh had a dream. The Minister without Portfolio Peter Mandelson killed it.

Sir Cameron, the producer of *Q&A* and *Miss Saigon*, had been drafted in by Mr Mandelson to the team organising the Dome exhibition for the millennium. Now Sir Cameron has admitted that his grand project has been dropped because it would have proved too expensive.

The show would have been called About Time and would have cost almost a third of the Dome's entire budget and would have involved 1,000 children. It was intended to seat 12,000 people, spectators would have entered into enclosed 1,000-seater segments, and in a great coup de theatre the walls would have risen to reveal the auditorium in its entirety.

The cost of construction had been estimated to be around £250m.

Sir Cameron said: "It has proved prohibitive. I am sorry it is not going to happen. But it is one of those chicken and egg situations. You have to do the show before you can cost it."

"But I am delightfully free of an extraordinary responsibility which was giving me sleepless nights. Now I can retire to mycroft in Scotland for Hogmanay 1999."

He said of the projected show: "It was a spectacular with a touch of *Back to the Future*. It had its roots in Britain's great past and looked to the future. Children were at the heart of it. Its underlying philosophy was along these lines - what you learn from the past is what the new generation has to use to take responsibility for the future. It was going to have an emotional heart to it. We did not want it to be just a technical display."

— David Lester

Disney's magic man earns £1m pay increase

The Magic Kingdom has again waved its wand on Michael Eisner, the chairman of the Walt Disney Company.

The genius overseeing Mickey Mouse, Goofy and Donald Duck has been given a £1m pay rise. This follows recent news that he cashed in a tranche of eight-year-old Disney stock options worth more than £300m - a landmark in American corporate history.

Mr Eisner, 55, sees his annual salary boosted to £6.6m, which is his handsome reward for guiding the firm through a very successful year.

During the past 12 months, Disney stock has risen from £42 to £60. The once-troubled company has had its best year. The films division has produced hits such as *Hercules* and there have been similar success stories in cable television and theme parks.

Under the autocratic control of Mr Eisner, Disney has become an entertainment giant over the past



Michael Eisner: Rising stock

ten years. He has been described as "Disney's biggest asset next to Mickey Mouse."

Disney lured Mr Eisner away from Paramount in 1984 when Disney was in deep trouble after a string of bad films and bad debts. He took a modest salary in Hollywood because of the all-important share options.

Taking the job on a perfor-

mance-related basis paid off and since joining his earnings total £660m.

In April 1994 Mr Eisner assumed complete management control of Walt Disney after Frank Wells, who had run the entertainment group with him for almost a decade, was killed in a helicopter crash. Three months later Mr Eisner had a quadruple heart bypass operation.

In November of this year, Mr Eisner was threatened with a lawsuit which would have laid bare studio accounts. Jeffrey Katzenberg, a workaholic and founder of the new Dreamworks studio, filed the lawsuit against Disney, his old employer. He claimed he was owed vast sums for producing the \$200m hit, *The Lion King*.

The dispute turned personal when Mr Eisner refused to promote him despite 10 years of loyal and lucrative service. The feud ended in a secret deal.

— Alexandra Williams

TRAVEL UPDATE

Road rage alert as Britons make dash for Christmas

For those who spend Christmas at home, it will be dark, wet and windy. Little wonder that record numbers of people - an estimated 650,000 - plan to flee to warmer climes this year.

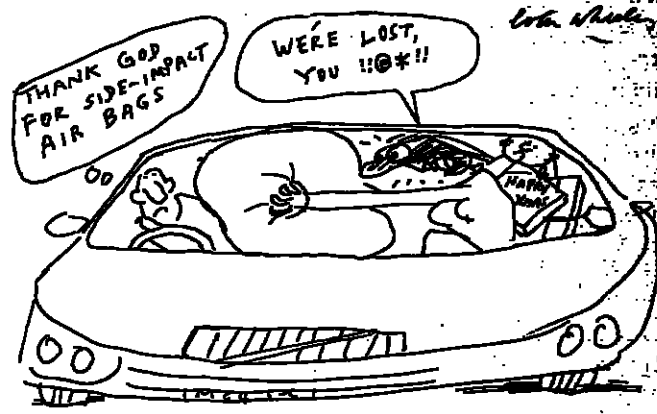
People driving to see relatives will find the worst traffic jams today, according to the AA, which suggested that people defer their journeys until tomorrow morning. The Highways Agency is to remove major roadworks over the holiday period, but routes to the airports, such as the M4 at Heathrow, are expected to be particularly congested.

The RAC, meanwhile, has identified a new hazard: Festive Alcohol. In-car rows are more likely than ever at this time of year, it warned, with tempers frayed as a result of over-indulgence in food and too much time spent with relatives. In such circumstances, poor map reading can be the last straw.

The airports will handle huge volumes of passengers over the coming days. Heathrow's busiest day so far was last Friday, when 180,000 passengers passed through the airport. Some 140,000 passed through the airport yesterday, and another 115,000 will join them today.

Gatwick, Britain's busiest holiday airport, will handle 900,000 passengers over the Christmas and New Year fortnight, a 30 per cent increase on the same period last year. One of its busiest days will be next Saturday, when 88,000 people are due through its departure and arrival lounges.

A 24-hour strike by customs officers at Gatwick, due to begin at 11pm last night, will not affect travellers. A spokeswoman for the airport said



that the strike, over new work rotas, would cause minimal disruption.

The Association of British Travel Agents said yesterday that the high number of people leaving the country for Christmas could be a result of the building society windfalls earlier this year.

Some 400,000 have booked package holidays, with Spain, the Canary Islands and the Algarve the most popular destinations. The most favoured long-haul spots are Florida and the Caribbean, while skiers are travelling mainly to France, Austria and Italy.

On Christmas Day, only two rail services will be running - the Gatwick Express from London Victoria, and the Eurostar train to Paris and Brussels. The Gatwick Express will also run on Boxing Day, together with Connex South Eastern services and those on the LTS (London Tilbury and Southend) line. Normal rail services will resume on Saturday, but Rail-track said some cancellations were possible because of maintenance work.

The ferry company Stena will operate three round trips on the Dover to Calais route on Christmas Day. It is carrying 350,000 passengers and 75,000 cars on its ferries to Ireland and continental Europe over the holiday period.

— Kathy Marks

Bank staff plan strike over festive opening

Customers at four high street banks could find services disrupted today as staff walk out in disputes over pay and working hours.

Thousands of members of the Banking Insurance and Finance Union at Midland are to stage a 24-hour strike in protest at the bank's insistence on opening this afternoon. In the past the bank has closed early to allow employees to prepare for Christmas.

At Royal Bank of Scotland branches in England and Wales, where employees are stopping work at 1pm, management is demanding that Christmas Eve be regarded as a normal working day from 2000. The bank is offering compensatory time off of one day this year and half a day next year, but none thereafter.

Staff at the Yorkshire and Clydesdale banks are taking action today over salaries. Both banks have imposed performance-related pay rises which the union claims will give many staff increases below the inflation rate and others nothing at all.

Ed Sweeney, general secretary of the union, said of the disputes over working hours: "Christmas Eve afternoon is a traditional holiday for bank staff and we don't accept that it could ever be a normal working day."

On the issue of pay, Keith Brookes, the union's assistant secretary, said banks were making record profits and could well afford "decent" pay rates. "It's no surprise that staff are fighting back," he said.

Richard Pulleyn, employee relations manager at Yorkshire Bank, said the stoppage would have a minimal impact on customer service. He estimated that nine out of 10 branches would be unaffected. The bank said its offer was worth an average rise of 4 per cent.

At Midland a spokesman argued that only one in 10 staff favoured taking industrial action and he expected virtually all branches to be open as normal.

— Barrie Clement, Labour Editor

THE INDEPENDENT

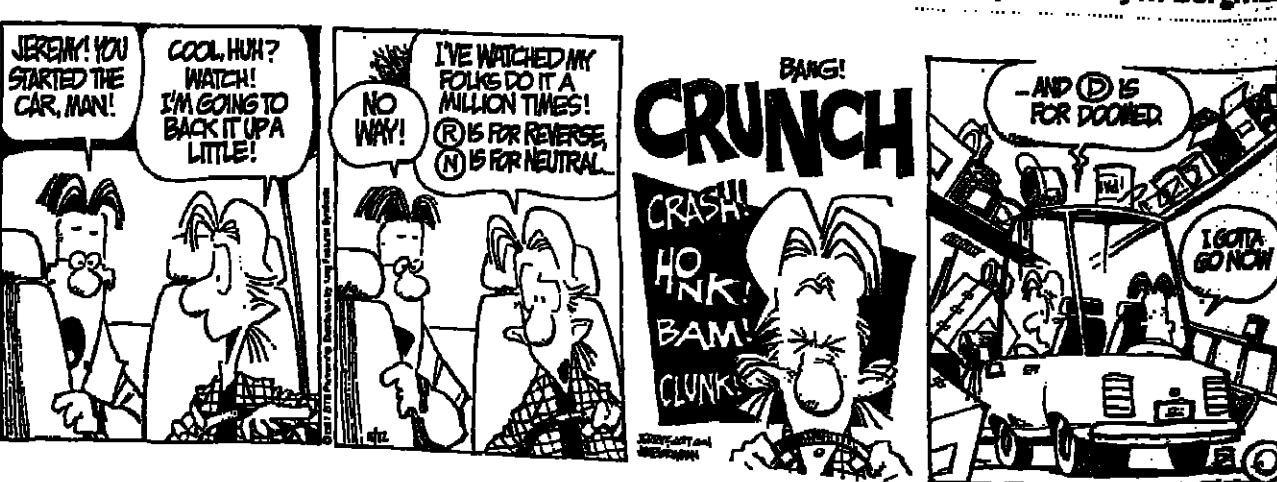
In common with other national newspapers, *The Independent* will not be published tomorrow, Christmas Day. But we shall be back on Boxing Day with a special edition which includes our top writers reviewing the moments that made the year, a complete guide to the sales and a sports quiz.

7.30 FOR 8

by Chris Priestley

ZITS

by Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman



IN BOXING DAY'S INDEPENDENT



Moments that made the year: our star writers on the top stories of 1997



sports quiz of the year; and our complete guide to the sales

Computer game firms accused of inciting attacks on gays

Virgin Interactive's European marketing director, Louie Beatty, recently said: "We never brief any agency to go away and be controversial. That would be sad." Well, if urging people to scream "Southern poofs" or "Northern gits" at innocent passers-by isn't controversial, what is, asks Clare Garner.



The adverts in Birmingham (top) and Hove, East Sussex Photographs: Mike Scott/News Team (top) and Andrew Haddon

A billboard campaign which invites onlookers to shout "Southern poofs" as an invitation to get beaten up is being investigated by the Advertising Standard Authority following complaints that it is homophobic.

The posters are part of a £500,000 nationwide advertising gimmick to sell a new computer game in the week before Christmas. A strapline on the top of all 400 posters reads: "New 3D Street Fighter EX. For the next closest thing, stand here and shout..." Beneath, the words "Southern poofs" or "Northern gits" are written, depending on whether the billboard site is south or north of Birmingham.

Last night Virgin Interactive, which is marketing the game, insisted that the campaign was a joke, designed to give the public a taste of the essence of the technology. The terms "Southern poofs" and "Northern gits" were being used "as tongue in cheek, as common parlance," according to a spokeswoman for the company.

"It's not meant to offend," she said. "It's not meant to be aggressive. That's not what we're about at all... We like to

think we are marketing in a way that is slightly different to our competitors. We try to grant people a bit of intelligence, that they won't take it at face value. That they can see the joke, see the fun."

But some members of the gay community have not seen the funny side. Tim Teeman, editor of *The Pink Paper*, the national newspaper for lesbians and gay men, has had calls this week from readers upset by the advertisement. "Irony or no irony, the meaning is lost on them. It's presented so aggressively. It doesn't sound like a playful use of the word 'poof', but an aggressive use which is a familiar term of anti-gay abuse."

The ASA is investigating the advertisement for possibly causing "serious or widespread offence." The watchdog's code states: "Particular care should be taken to avoid causing offence on the grounds of race, re-

ligion, sexual orientation or disability."

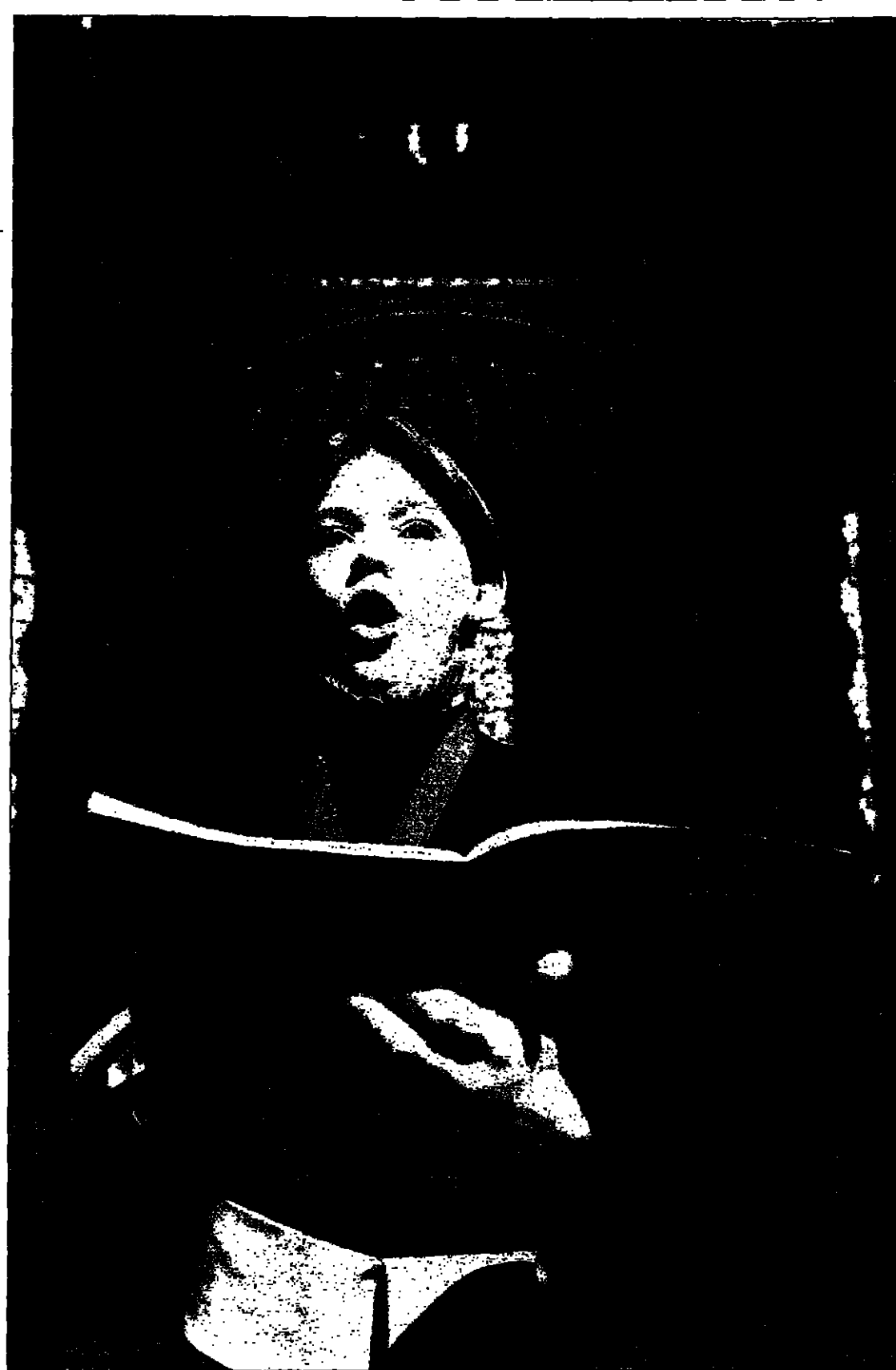
A spokesman said: "In this investigation, we will bear in mind that 'poof' has several meanings to different people, and even within the gay community itself."

Other current Virgin Interactive campaigns include one for the Bladerunner computer game which has a tagline: "I wanna get this guy out of my hair. Fingernails... carpet..." above a picture of an artificial human in the game. Another advertisement runs: "It takes guts to do what I do. Theirs." For the horror game Resident Evil, the line runs: "Contains bits of the original."

A spokesman for Sony, which makes Sony PlayStation, the machine on which the Street Fighter game is played, said yesterday that the "Southern poofs" campaign had been damaging to them. Although Sony has nothing to do with the manufacturing or marketing of Street Fighter games, it has taken some of the flak for the ad.

Liam Hilley wrote to Sony complaining about the poster outside his bedroom window. The term "Southern poofs" is, he wrote, "an incitement to hatred and condones queer bashing." His partner had bought a new PlayStation and a number of games for Christmas, but after he saw the campaign they were duly returned to the shop.

"I would have thought it better business practice for your company to encourage gay men to purchase your products," he wrote. "As gay men without family ties my partner and I have a disposable income in excess of £3,000 per month. I am not the only one to feel like this. My family and friends have decided to boycott your products."



Noteworthy: Edward Burrows, 12, head chorister at St Paul's in London. This will be his last Christmas at the cathedral, with a carol concert today at 4pm and midnight mass at 11.30pm Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

Spam, spam, spam, spam... er, no more spam

Spam. Spam Spam. Spam, lovely Spam and ... er, no more Spam. The favourite Monty Python meal is under threat. Yesterday the last factory in Britain producing the much-loved and much-laughed at luncheon meat has closed.

The Newforge factory in Liverpool has shut with the loss of 140 jobs after 40 years of producing Spam under licence for a US company, the Hormel Food Corporation. The Spam for all of Europe will now be produced in Denmark instead.

Spam, which took its name from its ingredients of shoulder pork and ham, first entered the national consciousness as a convenience food 60 years ago.

It became known as the soldier's food during the Second World War and formed almost a daily part of servicemen's rations because it was convenient, easy to digest and contained protein. But for civilians also, it was often the only meat available in wartime Britain and was indispensable until rationing ended in 1954.

But it was the Monty Python team that immortalised Spam in British minds. In one classic sketch John Cleese, Michael Palin *et al* dressed as Vikings to sing the Spam Song (Lyrics: "Spam, Spam, Spam, Spam, lovely Spam, wonderful Spam").

"I don't think we ever got permission from the company. We just went ahead," said Michael Palin. "In the end the Spam people were very keen and promised to send us several tins of free Spam. We said: 'No, that's all right. Thanks anyway...'"

The managing director of Newforge, Malcolm Johnson, said he was bitterly disappointed at losing the licence after investing £1.5m in new machinery at the factory over the last 18 months.

Mr Johnson said: "The staff have been magnificent. They have worked hard right up to the last day, hoping something would come up. But it hasn't... I have pleaded with Hormel but they would not budge."

In recent years, the factory churned out 12 million of the 60p cans a year with an annual turnover of approximately £8m.

Mr Johnson said he believed that with Spam having made 70 per cent of Newforge's produce, the company would now have to wind down.

Glenda Cooper, Consumer Affairs Correspondent

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We will save you money on your phone bill.
If we don't, we'll give you back double the difference.

Yes, it really is this simple: we promise that if you don't make savings on your call bill compared with BT's basic rate (even against their PremierLine and Friends & Family schemes but excluding temporary promotions), we'll give you back double the difference.* Yes, that's double the difference. So to see how much you could save, why don't you ring us now on FreeCall 0800 500 366 quoting RINDPR.

*Price Pledge terms apply on Cable & Wireless SmartCall, UK-Call and LocalCall bills only. For non-cable customers the Price Pledge comparison is on call charges only; for cable customers it is call charges and line rental. Application subject to status. Not available for Calling Card and non-geographic calls including mobiles. For quality of service purposes we may occasionally monitor or record your telephone calls with Cable & Wireless.



CABLE & WIRELESS
What can we do for you?

Harassed junior doctors explain why life is no fairytale

The long hours being worked by junior doctors are making them grumpy, sleepy and doxy. Now they are waiting to see whether Alan Milburn, the health minister, will respond to their plight like Snow White or the Wicked Witch. By Jeremy Laurance, health editor.

It's off to work they go but none of them feels like singing Hi-Ho, Hi-Ho. The British Medical Association introduced seven of the NHS's hardest workers to the press yesterday to explain why they lack a song in their hearts.

Dr Paul Flynn is doxy. He gets a couple of hours' rest a night if he's lucky, between helping new babies into the world at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle. Dr Liz Soilleux is grumpy because she gets half pay (not the time and a half, as is customary in other trades) when she's doing overtime at Milton Keynes General Hospital. Dr Judith Kerr is sneezy but dare not take time off because there is no one to cover for her.

The weary junior doctors are hoping Alan Milburn will play Snow White and see that hospitals honour the terms of the New Deal on their hours of work. That imposed a maximum working week of 72 hours for most doctors - of which no more than 56 hours should be spent working, with the remainder on call - but the deadline for its implementation passed a year ago and there are still 5,600 juniors working more than they should, according to the BMA.

Yesterday Dr Mark Porter, chairman of the association's junior doctors committee, wrote to Mr Milburn to protest about the lack of progress on improving juniors' working conditions. He said research had shown that working non-stop for 17 hours had the same effect on doctors' ability as a blood-alcohol level of 70 milligrams per 100 millilitres of blood. "The effect of a tired junior doctor is similar to that of a person driving after a Christmas party. We are concerned about the potential threat to patient safety."

Dr Porter said that emergency patients admitted in the small hours were at less risk from overtired doctors than routine cases. "When you are doing routine tasks out of hours on top of the emergencies, that is what makes you tired and grumpy and you can miss little things," he said.

Six junior doctors had agreed to go public on the poor conditions under which they are still made to work. However, one - Bashful - preferred to remain anonymous after signs that earlier protests by him had affected his job prospects.

"I was struck that in two separate job interviews I was asked about my problems with working long hours. It was generally implied that I was a bit of a troublemaker," he said. Dr Porter said many junior doctors working over Christmas would be denied even rudimentary comforts. In his letter to Mr Milburn, he said: "Many thousands ... have to endure sub-standard living conditions and face a night or bank holiday on call without a good hot meal."

This has grave implications for morale and is particularly depressing for those on call over the Christmas period. He added that a new effort was needed from NHS Trusts to implement the limits on hours of work.

Young man's cell death sparks big jail suicide inquiry

A teenager awaiting trial has become the 69th person to commit suicide while in jail this year. The record death toll, says Jason Bennetto, Crime Correspondent, has prompted the launch of a special inquiry into the New Year.

With a "disturbing" number of 15- and 16-year-olds being locked up, he said it had become a "gigantic transit camp" which was "grossly overcrowded" with more than 900 inmates.

The increasing numbers and shortage of resources made it incapable of tackling re-offending. A suicide last year was the first in four years at the jail. Four people took their lives in 1991-92.

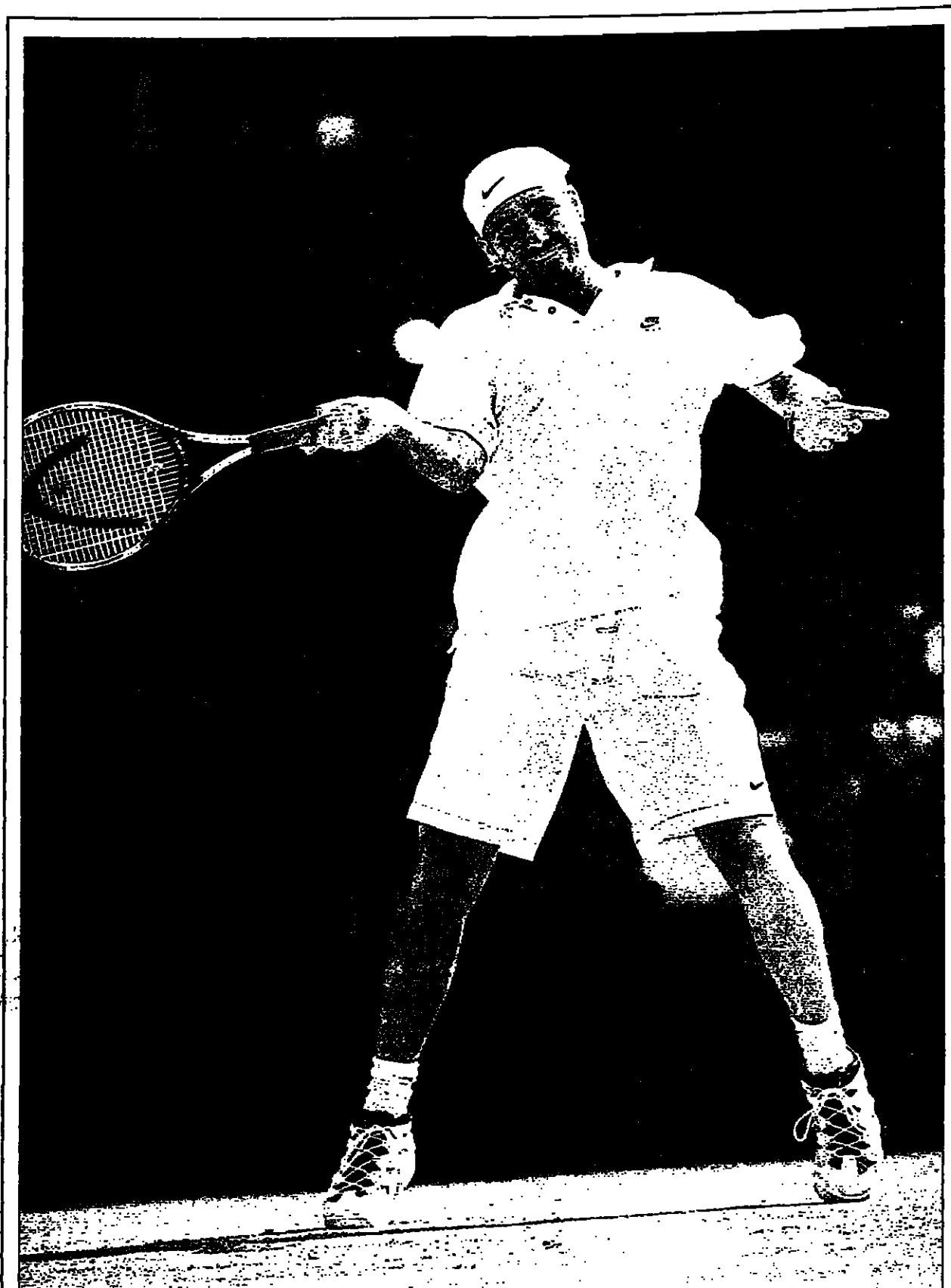
An internal prison investigation has been set up into the death of Ian Kerr and a coroner's inquest will also be held. The pressure group Inquest has been campaigning for years for the removal of vulnerable and young offenders from prison environment and to introduce new anti-suicide measures in prisons.

A spokesman said: "How many more deaths do we need before the authorities take some positive action?" A spokesman for the Prison Service said Richard Tilt, the Director General, had asked Sir David to set up the inquiry. He added: "It must be remembered that the suicide rate is rising among the general public, and particularly among young males aged 16 to 35."

"Prison suicides have to be viewed in this context, as there are a large number of this age group in custody. We also have a record prison population - if you take that into account the overall rate is declining."

Between eight and 12 new regional "correctional services" are to be set up to replace the existing probation system, it was said yesterday.

A Probation and Prisons Review will conclude that the regional centres are the best way of combining the work of the existing 54 probation services with the jail network.



Nike treads into environment row

The leading sports wear manufacturer Nike has been forced to redesign its Air trainers after discovering they are a threat to the environment.

The shoes, as worn by stars such as Andre Agassi (above), use a gas which fills the cushioned heels and soles, giving them buoyancy. The gas is far more damaging to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.

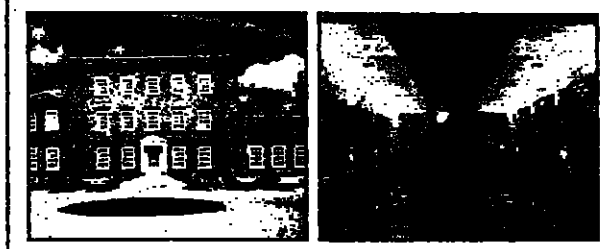
Embarrassed Nike executives, who pride themselves on being environmentally responsible, have promised to phase out the use of the substance sulphur hexafluoride, or SF6, within three years. Two-thirds of the shoes sold by Nike use the gas. The range, led by Air Max, went on sale in 1978.

The company uses 288 tonnes of SF6 a year, a gas which stays in the atmosphere for 3,200 years, 30 years longer than carbon dioxide. The switch from SF6 to nitrogen has been welcomed by environmentalists. Target Haa-land, a spokesman for Greenpeace, said: "It's a strong and very persistent gas and making shoes is a stupid use for it. It's excellent that they are phasing it out but why not 100 per cent by next year?"

Graham Anderson, a Nike spokesman, said that while world leaders had given themselves 15 years to cut in greenhouse gases, Nike had decided on a total phase out by 2001.

Alexandra Williams

THE INDEPENDENT
A Present for Yourself
WIN the new Swatch Dect Telephone and a luxury break at Henlow Grange Health Farm

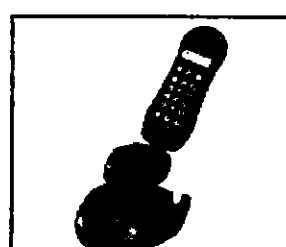


Start the New Year refreshed and invigorated by indulging yourself with the ideal present for your home and yourself. At Henlow Grange Health Farm there is a wide range of treatments such as manicures, facials and reflexology - the ideal way to overcome the indulgence and stress of Christmas. This package is worth £1,400.

We are also offering the new digital cordless phone from Swatch - The Dect. The telephone is able to make and receive calls up to 50 metres from the base station indoors or 300 metres if you are outside, allowing complete mobility with crystal clear sound. Six handsets can operate from a single base station. You can also reach someone else in the house with the exceptional feature of free internal calls which can be made even when another external call is active on the same line.

Call 0930 525227

For further information:
Henlow Grange: 01462 81111 (gift vouchers available)
Swatch: 0800 192192



Social worker link to abuse

A social worker has been suspended following allegations made during a major police inquiry into child abuse.

South Wales police investigating allegations of child abuse at 33 children's homes passed information to Cambridgeshire County Council which suspended the 48-year-old man.

A council spokesman said: "Police indicated he was involved in an inquiry relating to an alleged serious offence said to have been committed in the 1970s and the decision was taken to suspend him."

The man works as a front line social worker and is believed to have been employed in Cardiff 20 years ago.

South Wales Police have received more than 250 individual allegations of sexual and physical abuse made by former residents of homes.

Roger Dobson

Carey warning over cuts

The Archbishop of Canterbury yesterday said he understood the need to shake-up the welfare state but cautioned Tony Blair against making cuts which hit the needy.

Girl's Turkish lover marries

Musa Komeagac, the Turkish ex-waiter who married an underage British girl, Sarah Cook, last year, has married a Turkish woman in a Muslim ceremony, Anatolian news agency said. Religious marriages are popular in rural Turkey but not officially recognised.

Irving warns on reform of Lords

The Lord Chancellor yesterday appeared to back the idea of an elected second chamber in the Government's plans to reform the House of Lords.

DAILY POEM

The Oxen

By Thomas Hardy

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
Now they are all on their knees,
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwell in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

No fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come: see the oxen kneel!"

This week's poems come from *The Faber Book of Christmas*, all aspects of the season: sacred and secular, pro and con, at home and abroad (Faber & Faber, £9.99).

Laser-gun for the id

When may soon be able to use the gift list to Father Christmas by using a laser gun to shoot at toys, if, as things are, from the US is adopted, the phenomenon of kids' homes is a thing of the past.

Churchgoer

From the north of England, a churchgoer writes to the editor of the Independent.

Dear Sir,

I have just read your article about the churchgoers in the north of England.

I am a churchgoer myself and I am very interested in the churchgoers in the north of England.

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Bye-bye Teletubbies: children's letters tell Santa they'd rather have crayons

TOP 10 FOR BOYS

Pens
Teletubbies
Action Man
Bicycles
Playstation
Cyber pets
Star Wars figures
Football kit
Buzz Lightyear
Lego

Father Christmas can rest assured if he is having problems getting hold of Teletubbies – children would rather have pens, pencils and crayons, according to his elves at the Post Office.

A survey of children's wish lists sent to Santa Claus through the post found the traditional writing implements beat the

Teletubbies into second place. Laa-Laa proved the most popular figure with both boys and girls.

The Spice Girls, who snatched the Christmas number one spot from the Teletubbies this week, came in at number five among girls.

Tamagotchi cyber pets, bicycles and Sony Playstations also

cropped up frequently in the 750,000 letters sent to Father Christmas care of Reindeerland.

The longest list received was from a nine-year-old boy in Kent who asked for 1,453 individual presents.

A Reindeerland spokesman said an eight-year-old boy's request for £5m in unmarked banknotes had been turned

down, but a 91-year-old woman's wish for a man would be treated sympathetically.

In return for their presents, letter writers promised to put out more than 500,000 carrots and more than a million mince pies to keep Father Christmas and the reindeer going through the night.

Some 2,500 dummies and 67

babies' bottles were sent along with letters explaining their owners had grown "too big" for them. Forty-nine letters contained applications for jobs in Reindeerland.

Post Office chief executive John Roberts said the letters to Santa were among a record 2.225 billion letter and cards sent through the post this

Christmas. The biggest post bag came on Tuesday 16 December, when 135 million items were handled – an all-time record for a single day and double the normal daily total of 72 million.

More than 100 million customers were served at Post Office Counters in the month leading up to Christmas.

TOP 10 FOR GIRLS

Pens
Teletubbies
Cyber pets
Barbie dolls
Spice Girl dolls
Bicycles
Secret diaries
Baby New Born
Playstation
Barney

Net surfers send e-mail cards and virtual snowballs

It's Christmas Eve, you've got a hangover and have forgotten to send cards or presents. Fear not! Help is at hand. Glenda Cooper, Consumer Affairs Correspondent, looks at the joys of a virtual Christmas.

Internet traffic increases by one-fifth in the weeks running up to Christmas, according to the service provider Direct Connections. The reason they give is simple: people panicking that they have missed posting dates are turning to the Net to e-mail their greetings across.

If you are the sort of person who begins Christmas shopping late on Christmas Eve, a growing number of web sites are springing up to ensure that you can keep Mum, Dad and Grandma happy without having to move from your computer.

The first stop is of course the virtual Christmas card, for all those who forgot last posting date. Ben Elman, managing director of Mersinet, one of the providers which offers people the chance to send virtual cards free, says that he has seen increased interest in the concept.

Visitors to Mersinet's site (www.mersinet.co.uk/xmas) can choose a design from more than 20 offered including snowbunnies and traditional Christmas scenes. They can then add a personal greeting of their own. The way it works is that an e-mail is sent to the recipient informing them to go to an Internet site where the "card" can be picked up.

"Some people like to send Christmas cards to wish others happy Christmas," said Mr Elman. "They can go the day before – you don't have to be supremely organised. We're not like post offices – we never go to sleep, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year."

Claire Marston, 27, a communications marketing assistant, says that because she has three sisters – one who lives in Hong Kong, one who lives in San Francisco and one in Grimsby – she now relies on virtual communications to make sure everything gets there in time.

She said: "I'm not very organised over things like posting dates and birthdays, so virtual cards are really useful for me. When one of my brothers-in-law got a new job I managed to buy him a virtual pint over the Internet. I also like sending virtual flowers. It's a good way of keeping in touch if you're living far apart and especially if you're living in a different time zone."

So if you somehow missed the shops, then there's always virtual presents (www.virtualpresents.com) or virtual flowers (www.virtualflowers.com). Virtual flowers could be seen as a particularly good way of calming down a romantic partner who was hoping to receive the real thing. Again, the recipient receives an e-mail from the virtual bouquets robot telling them that their partner has sent them flowers and they can view them at the web site.

But Dr Roy Bailey, psychologist and clinical director of the New Row Clinic, Buckingham, said that the growth of virtual Christmas was more than just disorganisation but was the beginning of a new festive ritual.

"It is a reinvention of Christmas, to help make sense of it today," he said. "Virtual Christmas allows us to refresh the Christmas we know... Paradoxically, it's bringing Christmas closer. Computers are often seen as depersonalising but things like this actually make it more personal as the internet is used for expressing sentiments. I think it's actually quite iconoclastic."

Ben Knox, marketing director of Direct Communications said: "Over the past three years we have noticed an increase in Internet traffic of about 20 per cent in the two weeks leading up to Christmas. Although we have no way of knowing, my guess is that this is due to people realising they have missed the posting dates for Christmas and so are sending e-mail Christmas cards, children e-mailing Santa and people sending junk mail, like the e-mail snowballs which seemed to be in vogue last year."

Ah yes. Now this is a site for the truly lazy. If you can't even be bothered to get up from your chair to throw a snowball then you can access www.snowpark.ch/snowball.



Postman Brian Farr takes a breather from his busy schedule delivering post to Bethlehem. However this little town is not found in Israel, but a hamlet nestled in the Welsh hills near Llandeilo. And business has been brisk in the festive season for the village

postmaster Gwilym Richards. For rather than making the 2,200-mile pilgrimage to Israel, those wanting their Christmas cards franked in Bethlehem have travelled from as far afield as Southampton and the Scottish borders to the Carmarthenshire hamlet. Not wanting

to miss out on the opportunity, some tourists dropped their Christmas cards off as early as June.

For the past month Mr Richards, 61, has been furiously stamping more than 100 cards a day. "My right elbow is very tired. One day last week I had 35 cars parked in a

row outside the Post Office," he said. Destinations have included Jamaica, Japan, Australia, Poland and Canada. One of the most usual cards he sent was in Latin, addressed to the President of China. — Alexandra Williams Photograph: Philip Rees

Laser-gun shopping aims for the ideal wish list

Children may soon be able to send a 'gift list' to Father Christmas by using a laser gun on bar codes of toys, if, as likely, an idea from the US is adopted. Kim Sengupta examines the phenomenon of kids licensed to shop, and what it will mean for parents.

Just writing to Santa may no longer be enough. Juvenile shoppers could soon be presenting a comprehensive list of demands for Christmas backed up by the statistical data of the bar code.

The Toys 'R' Us chain has already successfully adopted the idea in its 600 outlets in America. Executives say it is likely to be introduced in this country in the near future.

Market testing was first carried out in the US last year, and operated throughout the chain this year. Children, guided by adults, are allowed to range freely through stores zapping the bar codes of toys they want. The information is picked up by the shop's computer, and the manager then presents accompanying adults with the list for their approval. Items on the list can be bought at once, or the printout can be kept to give friends and relations to use at any branch which is convenient to them.

A spokesman for Toys 'R' Us in Britain, owned by the American company, said: "We know the project has been a success in the US, and any development there is closely monitored over here. So obviously there is every possibility the concept may be used over here."

The marketing benefits for the chain are far reaching. In a fiercely competitive business, the company is building up a valuable databank which can be used for normal trading, and other occasions such as birthdays as well as Christmas.

However, in Britain the bar code system, say some toy retailers, can alleviate queues, as well as phenomena such as "toy rage" caused by the demand for popular toys such as the Teletubbies and Spice Girl dolls. Failure to get these can be seen as a failure of parenting duties by some parents and has led to rows and threats of violence in shops.

But even in the US there has been a mixed reaction to the children's version of a wedding list. Gary Cross, a historian at Penn State university, said: "There was a time when a toy mattered in terms of the relationship between parent and child or grandparent and child. Over the years the culture of children and adults' memories of their own childhood has grown further and further apart." He adds that the electronic register further alienates parents and children as they take away the need for discussion between parents and children.

A health guide on how to keep your cool is the nation's favourite book this Christmas. David Lister looks at what people are buying to read over the holidays.

Stress levels must be high this year. The most popular book this Christmas is *The Little Book Of Calm*, Paul Wilson's guide to stress-free living.

Wilson is an Australian advertising executive, and his book measuring 3in by 4in contains fewer than 1,000 words of advice. It ranges from breathing tips for bad sleepers to advising the "rediscovery of milk" for its relaxing powers.

The book has sold nearly 33,000 copies in the past week, making it one of the most popular Christmas presents and also one of the cheapest, retailing at £1.99. Over the year it has sold 230,000 copies in high-street bookshops and is almost certain to be the best-selling book of the year.

The nearest challenger in the pre-Christmas sales was *Bridget Jones's Diary: A Novel*, by Helen Fielding. The love and career traumas of a thirtysomething singleton, which first appeared in *The Independent*, sold just under 29,000 copies over the week.

The popularity of travel writing with a twist of humour is underlined by the next three entries, Michael Palin's journey in the Pacific and two books by Bill Bryson. The American writer and former *Independent* journalist's book on Britain, *Notes From a*



Michael Palin: his travel adventures have come full circle for a top 10 place

Small Island, which is number four this year, topped the pre-Christmas charts a year ago.

Fiction doesn't seem to be too high on most people's gift lists. Terry Pratchett, Louis De Bernieres and Helen Fielding were among the best sellers; but these were the only three fiction entries in the top 10. The death of the Princess of Wales and Andrew Morton's updated biography assured him of a top 10 place.

Frank McCourt's popular reminiscence

THE TOP SELLERS

- 1 *Little Book of Calm*, Paul Wilson
- 2 *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Helen Fielding
- 3 *Full Circle: A Pacific Journey with Michael Palin*, Michael Palin
- 4 *Notes from a Small Island*, Bill Bryson
- 5 *Walk in the Woods*, Bill Bryson
- 6 *Dickie Bird: My Autobiography*, Dickie Bird
- 7 *Diana: Her True Story - In Her Own Words*, Andrew Morton
- 8 *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, Louis de Bernieres
- 9 *Hogfather*, Terry Pratchett
- 10 *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir of Childhood*, Frank McCourt
- 11 *Nation's Favourite Poems*



Bill Bryson: two books among this year's leading sellers

of a Northern Ireland childhood and the autobiography of cricket umpire Dickie Bird are the other biographies in the list.

The survey of book sales was carried out by Whitaker Book Track, which monitors sales in 2,000 high street bookshops.

Richard Knight, managing director of Whitaker Book Track, said: "There were strong last-minute challenges from *Bridget Jones's Diary* and Michael Palin's *Full Circle*, but when all the figures were counted

there was no doubt that Paul Wilson is the nation's favourite author this Christmas.

"The record charts may have the glamour of show business, but plenty of people who never buy a record will be giving or receiving a book this Christmas. High-street bookshops sold some 3.5 million copies of 108,000 different titles in the week ending Saturday 20 December, representing sales of £30.8m – almost a 20 per cent increase over the equivalent week last year."

Churchgoers angry at Irish-only invitation to Christmas Eve midnight mass

Irish television's plans to broadcast a Christmas Eve mass from a church in Kilburn, north-west London, for the capital's Irish community have led to complaints from churchgoers of other nationalities that they are being excluded on grounds of race.

Radio Telefís Éireann (RTE) the Irish state broadcasting company which is to

broadcast the live mass tonight from the Sacred Heart Church in Kilburn, said the event was organised specifically to help bring together Irish emigrants and their families back home.

South African-born Veronica Conroy, who has attended the church's midnight mass annually for 30 years, and had her son baptised there, complained

that she was told by the parish priest that she could not have a ticket this year because it was for Irish-only.

She claimed the church was insistent until it learnt she was married to a man from Cork, at which point the priest changed his mind. "I was very upset, but I was even more upset that I could have had a ticket because

my husband is Irish, but not in my own right. Yet my husband doesn't even go to church," she said. "It was bizarre. A Greek neighbour was told she could have as many [tickets] as she wanted because her aunt was Irish. It's ridiculous."

Ironically Mrs Conroy's husband was once a priest. "The parish priest doesn't know that

though. My father was a deacon too. The whole thing is totally out of order," she said.

The Sacred Heart Church said it hoped to accommodate all worshippers by holding five other Christmas masses alongside the Irish one. But Mrs Conroy said that was not a substitute. "If it's at 7pm it's not midnight mass, is it?"

The parish priest, Father Dennis Cornican, said the problem was simply huge demand and having to give priority to tickets. "If you had 10,000 tickets you'd get rid of them all. Many non-Irish people feel it's an honour that this church has been chosen. The mass is going out live on RTE. The expectation naturally is

that Irish people in London are given the opportunity to come," he said.

The church has been a gathering point for Irish emigrants since the Fifties, when it featured in classic images by the late Waterford-born photographer Paddy Fahey.

At one stage in the Fifties Kilburn had 14,000 Catholic

churchgoers, the vast majority Irish. "In the years since the Second World War in Camden Town it was common to see the sign up in landlords' windows 'No Irish. No Blacks.' Since then the community has grown immensely in stature. You can go across all the professions and they're there." Fr Cornican said. — Alan Murdoch, Dublin

Jackal lawyers plead for acquittal

Attorneys for the man known as Carlos the Jackal yesterday asked a jury to acquit him of murder charges, saying evidence was manipulated and witness testimony not credible.

In a plea for the man once considered the world's most wanted terrorist, Olivier Maudret also told the jury that Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, the given name of Carlos, would not go free even if acquitted. Since Ramirez, 48, is also being investigated for four terrorist attacks, he would not be released. His defence team was making final arguments in his trial for the 1975 shooting of investigators Raymond Dous and Jean Donatini and Michel Moukharbat, a Lebanese Ramirez suspected of being an informer.

Francois Honnorat, another attorney, said the prosecution based its case on evidence fabricated by agents. He opened the last day of Ramirez's trial by accusing prosecutors and judges of "marching" the defendant through proceedings while presenting only "the appearance of proof".

Mr Honnorat accused the authorities of manipulating witnesses and falsifying fingerprint evidence. The lawyers also criticised the testimony of witnesses questioned at the time of the shootings: none had a clear view of the person who fired or of the weapon.

The defence has sought throughout the trial the presence of three witnesses to the shootings in a Latin Quarter apartment rented by a friend of Ramirez. The prosecution says it could not find the people. Latin American students studying in Paris at the time. Instead, the court has heard 22-year-old depositions.

Ramirez was captured in Sudan in 1994 and taken to Paris by French agents. He is accused of carrying out the 1975 seizure of Opec ministers and was involved in the 1976 Palestinian hijacking of a jetliner to Entebbe which ended with an Israeli raid. He was convicted in absentia of the killings in 1992, but once captured French law required a retrial. AP, Paris



Gift-wrapped: A boy leaves his presents on the table while listening to a priest during a lesson on Catholicism in the Belarus capital of Minsk

Photograph: EPA

Mother on trial as girl dies weighing 50st

A year ago last November, a 13-year-old Californian girl, Christina Corrigan, was found dead at her home, covered in sores and surrounded by filth. This week, her mother, Marlene, is standing trial for child abuse. Mary Dejevsky reports on a case being described by some as a West Coast version of the Louise Woodward case.

Christina died, naked and surrounded by empty fast-food containers, on the sitting-room floor of her home north of San Francisco. But she was not emaciated: she weighed almost 700lb (50st) and the post-mortem examination found that she had died from heart failure, due to obesity. She had not attended school for a year and spent her last days watching television, and eating.

Ms Corrigan, 48, a single parent with a full-time job, says that she did her best to look after her daughter, but things got out of control.

Since 1991, the girl refused

to see a doctor, and kept asking for food. Ms Corrigan was unable to lift or even move her daughter. Providing food was the line of least resistance. She says that she did not neglect Christina.

Lawyers for both sides in the case stress that the charge of child abuse does not relate to Christina's weight, but to the conditions in which she lived. The prosecution also claims that Ms Corrigan should have known about the sores and called a doctor. The defence says Christina told her nothing about them.

The legal arguments may

centre on the Corrigan's living conditions - Ms Corrigan's housekeeping, as her lawyer put it scornfully - but ever since details of the case came to light last year, it was Christina's gross obesity that shocked. The case also prompted awkward questions about the treatment of the increasing number of overweight people in America, and the rights and obligations of parents in relation to their children.

While there was widespread public horror that any child should have eaten herself to death, some asked why the local authority and doctors did

nothing about a child who was four times overweight for her age from the age of three and visited a nutritionist more than 30 times. There was initial care, but no continuing treatment, and from 1991, when Christina became too embarrassed to go to a doctor, no follow-up.

The case has prompted an outcry, too, from those concerned about discrimination against the obese and restrictions on personal freedom. Was anti-fat prejudice responsible for making Christina too embarrassed to see a doctor or go to school?

And could the situation supply a precedent for prosecuting parents with fat children?

Counsel for Ms Corrigan had requested that the case should be tried by a judge alone, on the grounds that pictures of Christina would arouse such strong emotions as to cloud jurors' judgement.

"People aren't used to seeing a 5ft 3in, 680lb little girl," said Ms Corrigan's lawyer, Michael Cardozo. This request was rejected, however, and a jury will decide Ms Corrigan's guilt or innocence. If convicted, she faces up to six years in prison.

— Reuters

Man held in scam over fake Marcos gold certificates

Police have uncovered an attempted £5bn fraud against a bank in London involving gold supposedly hoarded by Ferdinand Marcos, the former Philippines dictator.

A 47-year-old Australian is accused of trying to trade fake gold certificates giving him access to tons of bullion in a Swiss bank.

The man, who has not been named, was arrested on Monday in Melbourne after an operation involving the City of London and Australian police. Earlier this month a group of Australians is said to have approached Rothschild bank and asked for \$7bn credit.

As collateral it is said to have been offered certificates showing ownership of the bullion, said to be worth \$9bn. The bank contacted police, who alerted investigators in Melbourne.

The two forces carried out a joint operation to track down the man and recover the certificates. The man, from the Melbourne suburb of Albert Park, has been charged with possessing false documents and was bailed on Monday to appear in court in February.

Inspector Jeff Calderbank, heading the inquiry in Aus-

tralia, said: "It's alleged that a number of people approached the bank in London to trade gold certificates for a line of credit to the value of \$7bn.

The gold was allegedly worth \$9bn, but they were asking for only a percentage as a line of credit. They were holding forged gold certificates. It is alleged that the gold bullion ... was supposed to be held in a Swiss bank (and) was bullion from the coffers of Ferdinand Marcos."

Under the state of Victoria's Crimes Act, the man can be tried in Australia and does not need to be extradited to London. In 1986 Marcos and his wife, Imelda, fled the Philippines when a popular movement ended his rule. They fled to Hawaii, where Ferdinand died in 1989.

He is reported to have stashed billions of dollars in gold in Swiss vaults during his rule. But, despite searches, the Philippines has failed to prove the gold exists.

Mrs Marcos says her husband legitimately built up a fortune by trading in gold, but the certificates were stolen when they fled the Philippines.

Jason Bennett

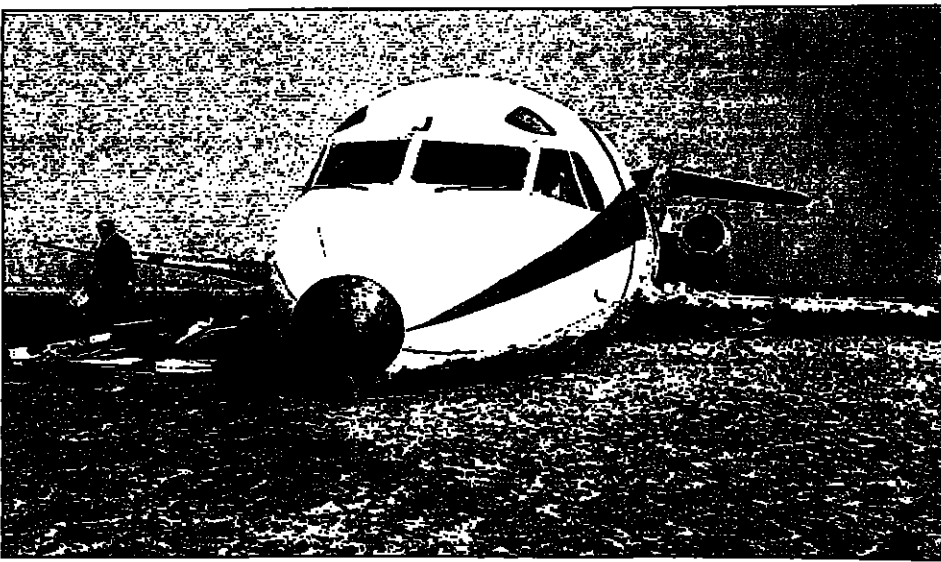
Jet crashes in Bangladeshi paddy field and all 89 on board survive

A Bangladeshi airliner crash-landed in a paddy field in fog and all 89 passengers and crew escaped. The plane had been badly damaged. It's a miracle the passengers and crew survived," Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, said. "Those injured are also not in serious condition."

A survivor, Abdul Jalil, said after emerging from the Biman Bangladesh Airlines Fokker 28: "I thought I was dying but later found myself alive. It's a miracle." Others said only a miracle saved them when the plane came down two miles from the runway near the northeastern town of Sylhet on Monday night. More than 55 people, including the pilot, Captain Mannan, were injured. Mr Khan said the Fokker 28 was procured by Biman in 1981 and was in "proper flying condition".

Hundreds of villagers, paramilitary soldiers and troops joined rescue efforts. "Floods of people started pouring in as soon as the sun came up," a police officer said.

An official at Sylhet airport said the plane, with 85 passengers and four crew on a domestic flight from Dhaka to Sylhet, made several attempts to land in poor visibility.



Lucky landing: Most of those taken to hospital had only minor injuries Photograph: AFP

"It's sheer luck that the plane did not burst into flames. That's why the passengers were saved from almost certain deaths," the official, who declined to be named, said. A passenger, Tara Miah, said: "It was about midnight and cold. The visibility was low due to heavy fog as we were preparing to land ... but all on a sudden there was a jerk."

"We knew something had gone wrong. Many started screaming and calling for Allah's

help. "Soon we saw we had landed on a paddy field in the dark." Babul Hossain, another survivor, said the plane "bumped wildly before hitting the land. It looked like we entered an air vacuum zone".

A reporter, Iqbal Siddiqui, who visited the crash site, described the plane as "ducking into a rice field with one of its wings broken and two of its wheels dug into the mud. The plane looked like a lame duck."

Captain Mannan told a reporter in hospital that he used the emergency exit in the cockpit after the aircraft had "roughly" hit the ground. The aircraft appeared to have been strongly pushed by stormy wind soon after I had issued the announcement for landing. And it went beyond my control."

Mohammad Habibur Rahman, a reporter who visited nearby hospitals, said there were a few people with fractures but most of the others had lesser injuries. Reuters, Dhaka

Yeltsin back at sanitarium after day at the office

President Boris Yeltsin left a sanitarium yesterday where he has been recovering from a bad cold and went back to work at the Kremlin. After sending New Year's greetings to foreign leaders, signing several decrees and issuing recommendations to parliament, Mr Yeltsin then returned to the Barvikha sanitarium west of Moscow, and is expected to stay there for another day or two while continuing to visit his office.

Doctors recommended that Mr Yeltsin stay at the sanitarium until the end of this week to regain strength. But Mr Yeltsin has been impatient to leave after being admitted on 10 December for treatment for a respiratory viral infection.

— AP, Moscow

Greeks expel Turk diplomat

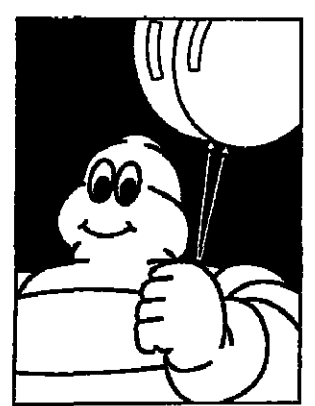
Greece expelled a Turkish diplomat from the northern city of Salonika yesterday in a spy row that has further strained relations between the traditional rivals. "Greece has decided to expel Nedim Ozerin, staff of the Turkish consulate in Salonika," a spokesman said. "He must leave Greece within the next few days." Greece had vowed to expel a Turkish diplomat on Monday, shortly after Turkey asked Athens to withdraw a diplomat at the Greek consulate in Istanbul.

Mediation with Luxor killers

An exiled Egyptian Islamist said he tried unsuccessfully to mediate between the Cairo government and armed Islamic groups after the Luxor massacre. Yasser el-Serri said he was revealing his aborted mediation attempt now because "hawks" in Cairo were carrying out a crackdown on Islamists.

Prayer for peace process

Yasser Arafat's Christian-born wife Suba lit up the Christmas tree in Bethlehem's Manger Square yesterday, opening the seasonal festivities in the town. She said she would pray for the future of her people's ailing peace process with Israel.



Sympathetic judge gives Germany's most costly fraudster a present for Christmas

Jurgen Schneider, the property tycoon who perpetrated the costliest fraud in post-war German history, was sentenced yesterday to six years and nine months in jail. However, this being the season of goodwill, the judge promptly lifted the arrest warrant, allowing the con-

vict to spend Christmas with his family.

Until the collapse of his empire in April 1994 with debts of DM5bn (£1.7bn), Schneider was feted as the developer with a Midas touch. Derelict urban landscapes turned at the wave of his wand into luxury shopping arcades. At the

peak of his career, he controlled prime sites in Frankfurt and Leipzig, and lived in a gilded Schloss in the German financial capital's stock-broker belt.

As creditors caught scent of the scale of his fraud, Schneider fled with his wife Claudia abroad. They were tracked down in

Miami in May 1995 and brought back to Germany in February 1996.

During his trial in Frankfurt, Schneider's defence rested on allegations that the creditors bankrolling him had known they were being hoodwinked. He did not dispute charges that he had overstated the value of

his holdings in order to obtain loans.

Heinrich Gehrke, the judge sentencing him yesterday, felt sympathetic to Schneider's position. "The banks knocked his doors down with almost unbelievable recklessness," he said. "They didn't check asset valuations, and if there

were shortcomings in his loan applications, they simply accepted them."

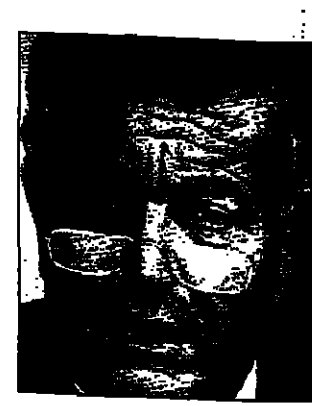
Among the creditors were Germany's biggest financial institutes, including Deutsche Bank, which lost DM470m.

"Schneider was neither a professional fraudster nor a Robin Hood of the prop-

erty world," said the judge.

Once Christmas is out of the way, Schneider will take up residence in a low-security prison. Having served 32 months already, he will shortly be entitled to home leaves at weekends. After 20 months, he will be up for parole.

Imre Karacs, Bonn



Schneider: Debts of £1.7bn

Helpin

Peace on Earth, goodness to all men: but how do you make it happen? As the Cold War becomes memory, diplomats, soldiers and academics are trying to find new ways of stopping conflicts, or dealing with them when they break out. Christopher Seely investigates.

There is a growing awareness that the world is not as peaceful as it once was. The Cold War has ended, but the world is still full of conflicts. Diplomats, soldiers and academics are trying to find new ways of stopping conflicts, or dealing with them when they break out. Christopher Seely investigates.

Year of resolution

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7/PEACE ON EARTH?

Helping the military to beat swords into ploughshares

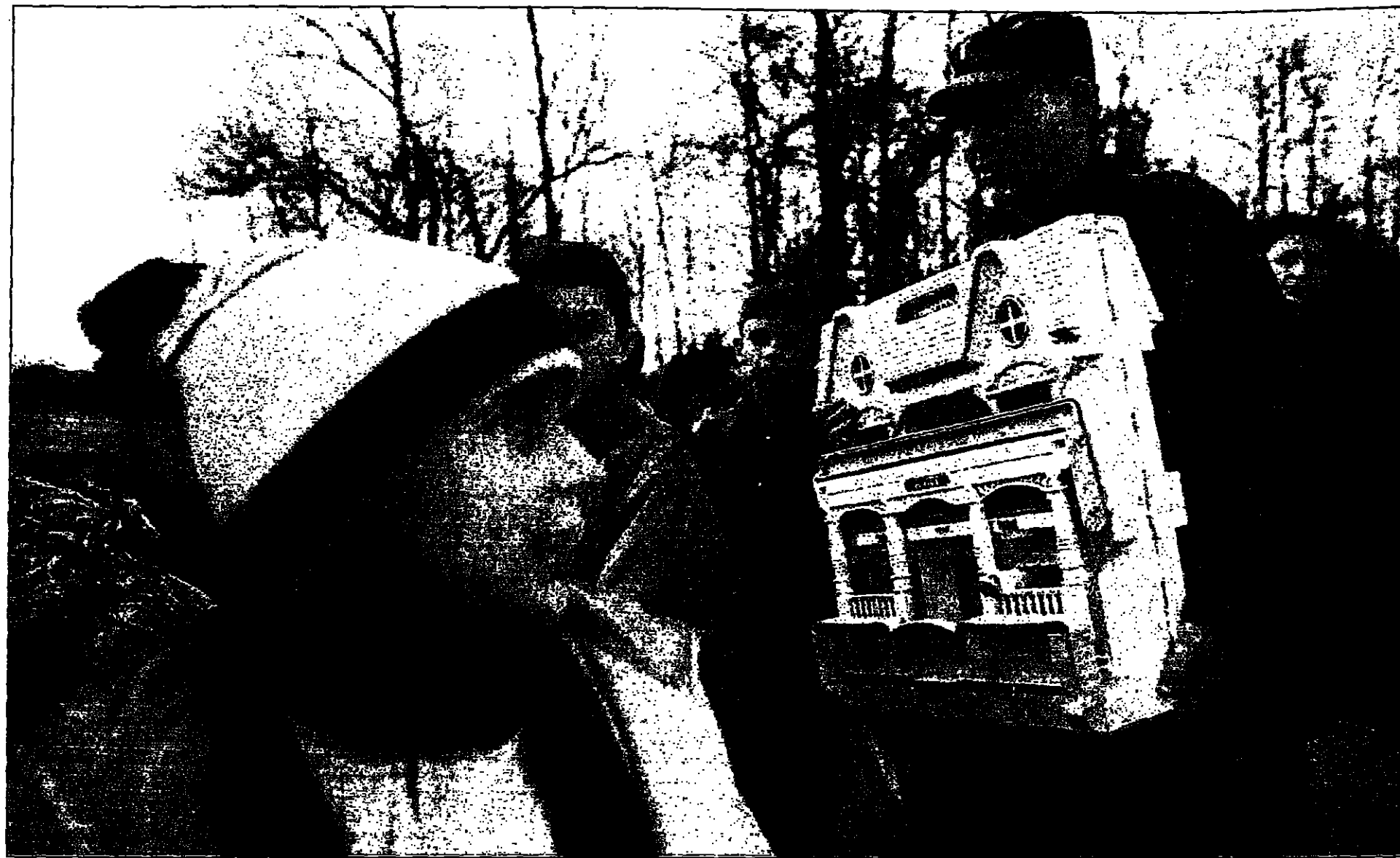
Peace on Earth, goodwill to all men: but how do you make it happen? As the Cold War becomes a memory, diplomats, soldiers and academics are trying to find new ways of stopping conflicts, or dealing with them when they break out. Christopher Bellamy investigates.

Peace remains as elusive as ever. The risk of major armed conflict between states may have reduced, though it has certainly not gone away as the recent confrontation between the United Nations, United States and Iraq has shown. And conflict within states and between groups operating unchecked across state borders is increasingly evident.

The UN Charter was designed for a world where the only actors were nation-states. Despite the confident predictions of a New World Order in 1991, the UN has often found itself inept, if not powerless.

But a new approach to security is slowly emerging. Since the end of the Cold War academics and other experts have increasingly called for a more holistic approach to security, taking account of wider human, demographic and environmental factors which lead to discontent and conflict, as well as the traditional areas of military defence, arms control and disarmament. In the long term, this could mean diverting traditional defence resources to other areas to create a secure environment.

Since the end of the Cold War, and the break-up of the Soviet Union six years ago, the need to widen the definition of security – and what to do about it – has been widely discussed. Military forces have increasingly been involved in humanitarian aid, development and disaster relief, and in what are now often called "complex emergencies", although there is no formal definition of the latter. The linkages between all



Seasonal cheer: Lt Douglas Scott carrying a dolls' house for one of the 50 children from the Tuzla area who attended a Christmas party at the Eagle Base near Tuzla

Photograph: Rick Bowmer/AP

FIVE CAUSES OF WAR

There are five main causes of complex emergencies: Economic – there is a strong correlation between poverty and instability, although even relatively well-off countries like the former Yugoslavia are not immune. Societal – the inclusion or exclusion of social groups, and their access, or otherwise, to power. Cultural – notably religion, but also ethnic and linguistic. Environmental – access to raw materials, water and arable land. Ideological – revolutionary and political movements, though these usually overlap with the other factors.

these areas became increasingly apparent.

A new definition of security, embracing conflict prevention and resolution, development and disaster relief as well as traditional defence, was discussed at a conference in Prague on "Security in the Third Millennium". The conference, which explored the interaction between the three Ds – defence, disaster and development – was sponsored by Nato, by the Czech Institute for International Affairs and Britain's Cranfield University.

The relationship between

defence and development is particularly complex. It is not always a simple see-saw, where resources invested in defence are denied to development.

Since the end of the Cold War the only part of the world where military spending has increased is the Asian Pacific Rim – where the advance of the "tiger economies" (until recently, anyway) combined with new and long-standing tensions has enabled those countries to spend more on arms. The role of the US as the arsenal of democracy in the Second World War created an industrial mo-

mentum which sustained half a century of post-war economic dominance. But in the Soviet Union and in Africa, money squandered on arms brought economic collapse and chronic instability, respectively.

The military has taken an active role in many of the complex emergencies since 1991, sometimes moving into areas such as post-conflict reconstruction where it is not the most efficient way of doing business. This has given rise to frequent accusations that the military is simply looking for a role. After all, a soldier costs about four times as

much as an aid worker. A key problem of recent years has been the emergence of new political structures which did not relate to nation states, including international corporations and "sub-state" or "non-state" actors – warlords and cartels. In dealing with complex emergencies, it was therefore difficult for the UN to know with whom to negotiate.

In areas rich in natural resources, local security was increasingly the responsibility of commercial security firms, while larger security issues were increasingly the responsibility of

multinational organisations. Many of the "complex emergencies" such as Somalia and Bosnia, resulted from the implosion or collapse of nation states, and the emergence of many such groups. The UN has, so far, tried to resolve such emergencies by refocusing the power of the state – using a mixture of military power and emergency aid. However, this may not always be the best way and military forces may be seen as imposing an unwanted authority.

The UN has no definition of "complex emergencies" – but then there is no definition of

"peace-keeping" in its Charter. A "complex emergency" could start with a natural disaster, or with reckless and destructive exploitation of natural resources, as happened in Bougainville in Papua New Guinea leading to deprivation, exploitation, abuses of human rights and conflict.

New views about security could mean some far-reaching changes over the coming years. There have already been demands to radically alter Nato's "Strategic Concept", last rewritten in 1992, which has changed little since the Cold War and which many observers

regard as anachronistic. Oliver Cromwell, reporting to Parliament in 1654, reminded it that "though peace be made, it is interest that keeps peace". This has been the approach used in Northern Ireland and Bosnia: pour in resources and investment, and give the people something to lose if there is a return to violence.

Recognition of the D3 concept of development should mean that previously hidden connections become apparent.

● The writer is Reader in Military and Security Studies at Cranfield University.

A year of massacres, coups and resolution of long-running conflicts

JANUARY
Middle East: Off-duty Israeli soldier opens fire in Hebron, wounding five people; Israeli warplanes bomb suspected Hezbollah strongholds in southern Lebanon; Israel and the Palestinians sign a pact on pull-out from Hebron and parts of the West Bank.

Russia: Moscow completes troop withdrawal from Chechnya.

Sri Lanka: Separatist Tamil rebels launch major attacks on two northern military camps in Sri Lanka, killing 60.

Algeria: a car bombing and an armed attack on a village outside Algiers kill at least 66 people; attackers slit the throats of 45 people in villages south of Algiers; gunman kills the leader of Algeria's largest labour union.

FEBRUARY
Sri Lanka: Tamil rebels attack two government military bases, killing at least 48 people.

Albania: Parliament declares a state of emergency.

Middle East: Jordanian soldier opens fire, killing seven Israeli school girls on a field trip to the Jordan River.

MARCH
Zaire: Rebels take control of Kisangani, the third largest city.

Albania: US Marines evacuate hundreds of foreigners trapped by the insurgency. A boat carrying Albanians seeking refuge in Italy strikes an Italian navy ship and sinks.

Middle East: Israeli bulldozers begin carving up an east Jerusalem hilltop as work starts on a Jewish neighbourhood.

Palestinian protest in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Papua New Guinea: More than 2,000 civilians riot in Port Moresby, against government contract with a British mercenary group to quash a nine-year rebellion on the island of Bougainville. Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chan, resigns.

Disarmament: President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin hold summit in Helsinki and agree to slash their nuclear arsenals.



Saddam Hussein found himself down, but not out, while it was the end of the line for Zaire's President Mobutu



APRIL
Middle East: Jewish seminary students kill a Palestinian in Hebron, sparking riots in which troops kill two Palestinians.

Zaire: President Mobutu Sese Seko declares a state of emergency.

Peru: Peruvian troops storm the Japanese ambassador's mansion in Lima, and rescue 72 hostages held for four months.

All 14 rebel captors, two soldiers and one hostage die.

MAY
Zaire: Mobutu gives up power after 32 years. Zaire's new leaders rename the nation the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Laurent Kabila is sworn in as president.

India/Pakistan: The countries leaders meet for the first time in four years and agree on measures to ease tension between their countries.

Afghanistan: The Taliban captures Afghanistan's northern provinces and drives warlord Rashid Dostum into exile.

Sierra Leone: Rebel soldiers led by Army Major Johnny Paul Koroma elected president in a bloody coup.

Europe: President Yeltsin signs a security agreement with Nato and pledges to no longer target Russia's nuclear weapons at Nato.

JUNE
Congo: Republic of Congo's government soldiers battle former president General Denis Sassou-Nguesso's 5,000-strong "Cobra" militia.

Cambodia: Pol Pot, ailing leader of Khmer Rouge, is captured and his 30-year guerrilla movement is over. Second Premier Hun Sen launches a coup d'état.

JULY
Europe: Nato invites Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to join the alliance.

Cambodia: Hun Sen holds a Cabinet meeting and declares himself the country's sole master. Pol Pot is put on trial.

Bosnia: Nato holds first raid to capture Bosnian war crimes suspects, seizing three Bosnian Serbs and killing another.

Middle East: A double suicide bombing in crowded Jerusalem market kills 15 people, including the two bombers, and injures more than 150.

AUGUST
Algeria: Attackers massacre at least 300 villagers in Rais. Attackers slash to death another 47 people south of Algiers.

SEPTEMBER
Middle East: Suicide bombs rip through a mall in Jerusalem,

killing seven and wounding 192. Hamas claims responsibility. Israel freezes handover of West Bank land; Lebanese guerrillas and soldiers attack an Israeli commando unit in southern Lebanon, killing at least 11.

Egypt: An Egyptian military court convicts 72 Islamic militants of subversion and sentences four to death. Gunmen open fire on a tour bus outside Cairo's Egyptian Museum, killing nine and injuring 50.

Disarmament: 89 states approve text of treaty on global ban on land mines, but US refuses.

Algeria: Armed men raid an Algerian village, killing at least 200 people.

OCTOBER
Congo: The UN orders its human rights investigators out of Congo until the government permits investigations of alleged massacres.

Middle East: Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, returns to Gaza Strip after being freed by Israel in exchange for two Mossad agents. Israel releases nine Palestinian prisoners as part of a swap.

Disarmament: American Jody Williams and her International Campaign to Ban Landmines win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Iraq: Baghdad bars two US arms inspectors from entering the country.

NOVEMBER
Europe: Greek and Turkish prime ministers agree summit to implement a US-brokered, non-aggression pact.

Iraq: Iraqis turn back UN weapons inspection teams with American experts. UN votes to condemn Iraq and slaps a travel ban on selected Iraqi officials.

UN withdraws all arms inspectors. They return after a Russian-brokered deal.

Egypt: Gunmen open fire on tourists outside a temple near Luxor, killing 68 and injuring 24.

DECEMBER
Bangladesh: Government and rebel negotiators sign an accord ending 22-year separatist wars.

BT's Christmas Special

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BT It's good to talk...this Christmas

Montserrat's refugees say it's hard to celebrate

Montserrat used to be the place to go for a typical Caribbean Christmas. Now, the capital, Plymouth, where a big Christmas tree used to light up the picturesque harbour, has been destroyed by volcanic eruptions. Phil Davison says it is not easy for the remaining islanders to celebrate, but the seasonal spirit is not dead.

As always, Joseph, 57 and Helen, 59 will wake up on camp beds on a cold stone floor alongside the old baptism font in the Anglican church of St. Peter's tomorrow. They will hitch a lift to their own pentecostal church for a Christmas service and return to St Peter's, a refugee shelter for volcano victims, for a Christmas dinner of goatwater, a stew handed down by Montserrat's Irish settlers, rice and bananas.

The Hallorans have lived in the church for six months, since the biggest eruption of the Soufrière Hills in June, along

with 30 other elderly refugees. The pews have been arranged to divide each family's space, with hospital-style standing curtains to provide a minimum of privacy.

Chickens and goats wander in and out of the open front and back doors and through the untended, knee-length grass between the old gravestones outside, where refugee women scrub and dry their laundry. The church's old outside toilet serves all 30 and the kitchens are three wooden shacks built between the graves. With only domestic electric fires for heating, it is bitterly cold at night.

"[Volcanic] ash mashed up our house on the other side of the Belham Valley," said Joseph, a former lorry driver and gardener also known by many of his friends as James.

"They came here and said we could have homes but offered us only a wooden one. That's useless. Our country gets hurricanes every year. The roof would blow off just like that. This church was built to withstand hurricanes."

"They've built new stone houses as refugee homes," added Helen. "but they're asking rent of 150 EC [East Caribbean] dollars a month." That's around £40 but a lot of



History note: A row of ash-covered dolls abandoned in a shop when ash and debris from a pyroclastic flow led to the evacuation of Plymouth last August

Photograph: Colin Braley

was idyllic here. This year, I'll probably slam my door and ignore it," he said. "We're not really living. We're making time. It's tragic. These people [his fellow refugees] were teachers, doctors, civil servants. It's tragic."

Did he really have to be here? "I have no place else to go," he insisted. "I travelled all my life and have no home in the US. I only get EC\$200 a month here. I'm convinced the hidden agenda is for every one to leave. At some point, it will no longer be viable. But I wouldn't be eligible to get to Britain. I'd have to find a way to get back to the States."

Back in St Peter's Anglican church, Joseph and Helen agree. "I think they [Britain] would be happier if everyone left the island," said Joseph. "Our island has no oil, no gold. It's easy for them to get rid of us."

Despite their plight, they have not lost their faith. As I left, the Hallorans led the other refugees, accompanied by a guitar, in belting out hymns. The volcano's destruction forgotten for a moment, they sang: "Oh Lord, my God, when I, in awesome wonder, consider all the works Thy hand hath made... How great Thou art."

money to the Hallorans, who each receive only £35 a month in food vouchers as refugee assistance. Their home, in a new-erected and unsafe zone, was all they had.

Beside the old baptism font, Joseph keeps one remaining possession, a garden water pump, his pride and joy. "We used to have a lovely garden. I'm keeping the pump until we get

another," he said. "We want to get out of here but we just don't have the money," added Helen. "Some of the others use terrible bad language. The great joy of Christmas is not here."

In another shelter, a former school, only a few yards inside the current "safe zone" near the village of Salem, Montserrat's one white refugee, American Tom Mowry, 63, is slightly bet-

ter off. He has a stone-floored room to himself and the furniture he was able to get from his abandoned condominium during a quiet moment between volcanic eruptions. His valuables had been looted by robbers who must have slipped into the evacuated zone.

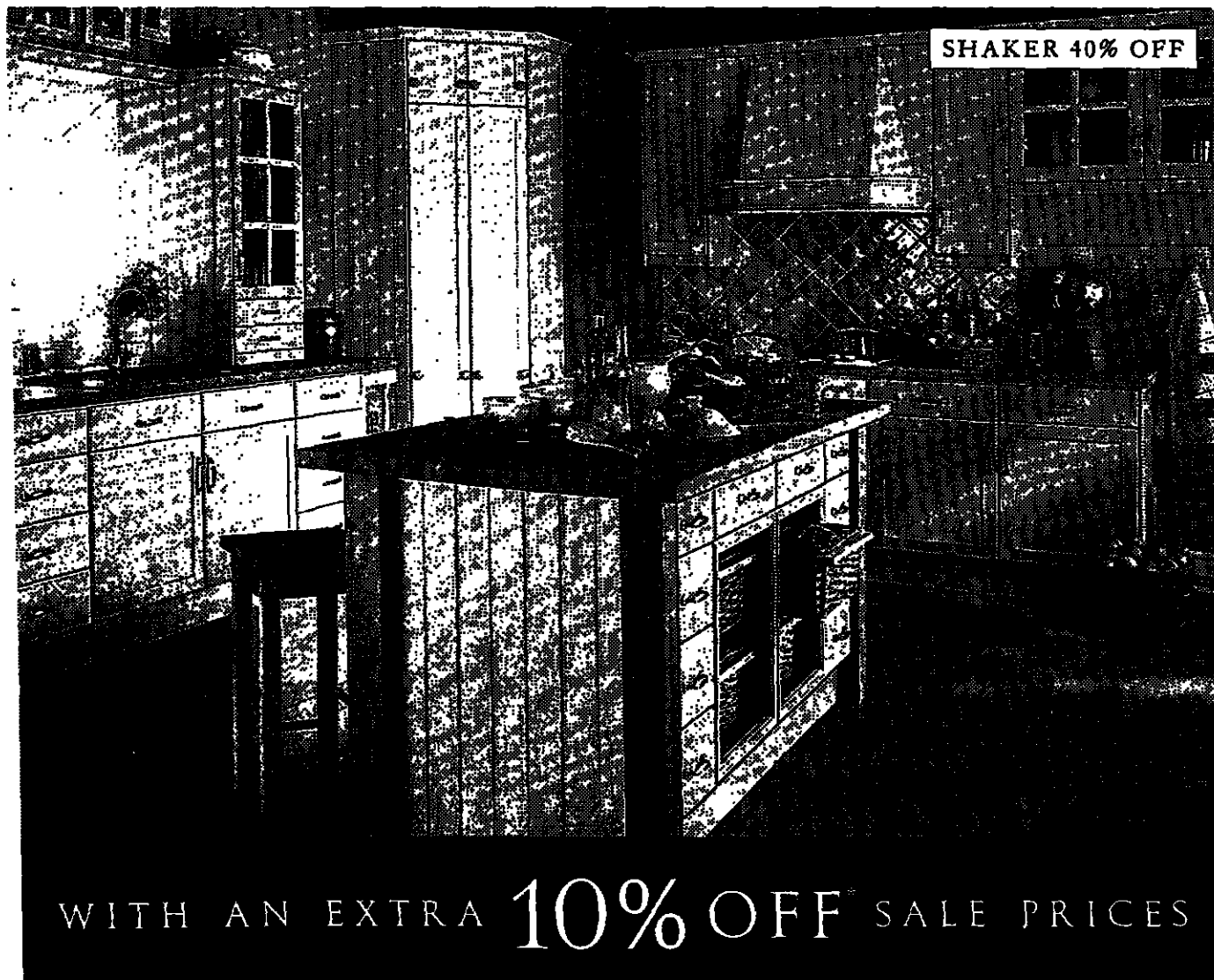
He may be slightly better off, but not much. He and his neighbours, some as old as 90, had

no running water for four days. The showers are of corrugated iron, outside, 30 yards or more from the shelter. "We had to put the doors on ourselves," said Mr Mowry.

Mr Mowry is a retired psychologist and Korean war veteran who has worked around the world for world organisations including the United Nations High Commission for

Refugees in Somalia. "Now I can see the other side at first hand," he told me. His £45,000 condominium outside Plymouth is covered in ash and now totally out of bounds. "If you tried to get back in there and there was a pyroclastic flow [an avalanche of red hot ash, gas and rock], you'd be a crispy critter pretty quickly," he noted. "Three years ago, Christmas

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IND a13

Iranian law blamed as girl killed by drug-addict father

The cruel death of a nine-year-old girl - taken from her mother and handed to the custody of her drug-addict father after her parents' divorce - has scandalised Iran. But, as our correspondent reports from Tehran, the tragedy of Arian Golshani is leading to ever louder calls for a reform in the 'Islamic' laws which favour men over women.



Arian, nine: Died after being handed over to her father

Arian's photograph rests on a library shelf in Shirin Ebadi's office, a black ribbon wound round the top right-hand corner to remind visitors of the fate of the bright, open-faced child. Half-starved and beaten by her father and step-brother, she weighed just 15kg (2.35st) when she died three months ago. And Mrs Ebadi's voice breaks when she speaks of the little girl. "Our 'Islamic' law killed Arian because our regulations insisted that she should be given to her father," she says. "Our law was guilty."

As head of the Iranian National Association for the Support of Children's Rights, Mrs Ebadi speaks her mind. She represented Arian Golshani's mother in the court case that followed the girl's death and openly blamed the misinterpretation of Koranic law when she appeared before the judicial authorities.

Arian's father, Ali, was an addict - he had already been convicted of illicit relationships with other women and had been whipped for this - so why did he have custody of Arian?" she asks.

Nahid and Ali Golshani had divorced in 1991, when Arian was three. Under Iranian law a daughter can stay with her divorced mother up to the age of seven, boys up to only two years old, providing the mother does not remarry. But Mrs Golshani remarried. Desperately unhappy, Arian was handed over to her father and his new wife, Zahra, to live with them and with Zahra's 12-year-old son by an earlier marriage, Ramtin. "They were torturing her," Mrs Ebadi says. "Although her father had money... they never gave her enough to eat. She was almost starving. She was so frail that when her half-brother Ramtin kicked her, she fell to the ground and started haemorrhaging."

Iranian newspapers gave big coverage to Arian's death - and the *majlis* (parliament) passed a new law giving custody of children to relatives or or-

phanages if their parents were not qualified to look after them. "It was not what we wanted, but it was a small step forward," Mrs Ebadi says. "We want the law changed so that after a divorce the court can decide who would be best at looking after the child. The law about giving a child to the father can be changed easily. There is nothing about this in the Koran - this is an Iranian misinterpretation of Islam."

Mrs Ebadi writes in the Tehran press insisting on the need for legislative change but her campaign has earned her hate mail and threats. "People said that I was wrong, that I was a feminist, that I was 'on the side of the West'."

She is careful not to blame men for the lot of Iranian women. "We have 6,000 years of civilisation here," she says. "The problem is that our laws come from a wrong interpretation of Islam. We could change these laws easily... all these new laws were written after the 1979 revolution."

Ask Mrs Ebadi about her views on the laws governing *hijab* - Islamic covering for women - and she scoffs at such a foreigner's question. "I have bigger problems to deal with. When a husband can kill his wife and get away with it, this is a real problem - Did you know that we had 10,000 women demonstrating after Arian's death? And all of them were shouting: 'The law must be reformed.' This is what we should be concentrating on."

BY ROBERT FISK

If he could make an ass of himself, what about them?

Damien Hirst, we learn, first began dabbling in animal parts as a boyish Bottom. What other prophetic epiphanies, Paul Taylor asks, lurk in the cast-lists of school plays past?

The schoolmaster who taught art to *enfants terribles* Damien Hirst and Marcus "Myra" Harvey split the beans to the press recently about his students' triumphs in the world of amateur drama. Hirst, it seems, wowed pupils and parents alike with his Bottom in an end-of-the-year production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "I had to twist his arm a bit," Mr David Wood, now 60, recalled. "Once he realised it was a part he could go to town on, he was in his element." Evidently not a pinched Bottom; one wonders whether there was a whiff of formaldehyde about the ass's head. Marcus Harvey, by contrast, played in a school production of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. "He liked to be very helpful and used to visit Mr Wood's home in Dunsbury to paint scenery for the plays staged by the town's art group," glowed one report.

The revealing light cast on the people in today's headlines by their thespian activities at school is a field of study still relatively untitled. Untitled, that is, until now. Daunted not by my chronic allergy to dust, I have spent a happy fortnight rummaging in the school magazine stacks of yesterday and taking my trusty tape-recorder to many a Sunset Home never before lit up by a journalist's presence. As the druggist is dragged over the school nativity play for yet another year, here I am ripping the wraps off the behaviour on the boards of the makers, shakers and fakers of the People's Britain.

The five-year-old Myra Hindley caught in an indelibly touching performance as the *Virgin Mary*? *Christine Hamilton* lifting the roof off the school hall with a precociously definitive *Lady Macbeth*? Oh, please, let's not be obvious about this. Let's begin, instead, with the current Minister for Further "Education, Education, Education", the very lovely Baroness Tessa Blackstone.

"Tessa had us all in stitches with her gaffe-prone Mrs Malaprop - especially the night she left her beauty spot backstage in a biography of Beatrice Webb!" reminisces her drama teacher at Ware Grammar School, 86-year-old Miss "Dodie" Grange. "She took direction like a lamb and was always the first to make helpful suggestions about improving Sheridan's dusty old dialogue. By the time we came to the first performance, Mrs Malaprop's mistakes, or 'presentation problems' as Tessa preferred to put it, had been halved. In my mind's

ear I can still hear the happy laughter Tessa's characterisation provoked."

Over at La Sainte Union Convent, Bath, some four years later, a woman on the other side of the political spectrum was strutting her stuff as Shakespeare's most poetically ineffectual monarch. "What Ann Widdecombe's Richard II lacked in ethereality," reports the anonymous reviewer in the *La Sainte Record*. "It more than made up in the occasional searing glimpses it gave of the much firmer ruler Richard might have been, had Fate allowed him to get a proper grip on himself. Top marks to Ann for a super death scene, its pathos only enhanced by Miss Abercrombie's sterling work on the zither."

Before he went up to Durham Choir School, one Anthony Blair was causing quite a commotion at his nursery nativity play. Let Mrs Morag McTavish, who penned and directed the show, take up the story: "Och, he was a wee rascal when he was a bairn. He had a great pal, Harriet; we used to call them Noddy and Big Ears, on account of Harriet's rather large lobes. Well, I cast the two of them as the innkeeper and his wife, you know, the ones who turn Mary and Joseph away. They had a wee duet - 'No room, no room / haven't any room / haven't any room / haven't any room / in the inn, sir' - and lovely firm arm-gestures."

"Everything went swimmingly at rehearsal. The performance, on the last day of term, was what I think you media people would describe as 'a different ball game'. Blow me down, if Anthony didn't wander off and start distributing Christmas cards to the rest of the cast, leaving poor Harriet to struggle on solo, with the ox and the ass noisily ripping into their envelopes. I said to him, 'Why do you think Miss Robisher went to the trouble of putting a Christmas post-box outside her office?' But when that wee laddie turned on a smile, och, you could forgive him anything."

Mrs McTavish is a keen follower of her pupil's continuing acting abilities: "When he read that passage from *Corinthians* at Princess Diana's funeral, he made it so much his own - so much, as they say these days, 'in the moment' - why, you quite forgot that St Paul had had the trouble of writing it first!"

That behaviour in a nativity play may be a clue to a performer's future is borne out by Andrew Morton's biography of Diana. There, "in her own words", she reveals that at her prep school, Riddlesworth Hall, "I was one of the twits who came and paid homage to the baby Jesus." It was "the thrill of putting on make-up" that made school theatre bearable for her. But both here and at her later alma mater, West Heath, she reveals, "when I was asked to

act, it was only on condition that I shouldn't have to speak." And that's kind of prophetic, for though she did learn to use her mouth in public, it's essentially as a silent image rather than as a voice that she is destined to be remembered.

On a hunt through the yellowing glory of the programmes for the plays put on at Hendon County Grammar School, my eye hungered for some sighting of Mandelson P. Would I find a record of his sizzling rendition of "Flash, Bang, Wallop, Wot A Picture!" in a never to be forgotten production of *Half a Sixpence* or of the

amusing slip-up when his heavily padded Mr Pickwick launched into a slightly revised version of his signature song: "When I rule the world / every day will be the first day of Lent". No such luck. There's just one reference, where, in a list of acknowledgments in the programme to a modern-dress *As You Like It*, a Peter Mandelson of Form 3 is mysteriously thanked "for the loan of his Dusty Springfield record".

A reluctant thespian, then, as with someone once well known to readers of *The Independent*. Here is an extract from her school magazine, Spring Term 1975: "When

a flu bug decimated the cast and a skiing accident put Sophie Robinson in traction (get well soon, Sophie, the lacrosse team hath need of thee!), the mantle of Gwendolen Fairfax [in Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest*] fell on to the surprised shoulders of Bridget Jones." The reviewer reports that Jones "acquitted herself creditably" and gave a special spirit to the lines: "I never travel without a diary. One should always have something sensational to read on the train." It's clear from the tone of this review that the writer had an unreciprocated crush on Ms Jones.

And it's clear too, from the tone of the review that Stephen Fry wrote in the *Upington* magazine at the tender age of 13, precisely in what direction he was heading. He begins by chiding three Inca extras in the school's *Royal Hunt of the Sun* for bunking off to the pub. Then he does an about-turn and starts to defend the truants in those Wildean accents that have since given pleasure to millions: "The first duty of life is never to see through appearances. The second is to see through one's disappearances to the scrumptiously sweet end."

To all the above, a very Merry Christmas.



Christopher Lee: out for the Count again

Horror of horrors! It ain't over till the tall, dark and gruesome guy sings

It's 26 years now since Christopher Lee last made a horror film. But that won't stop Marianne Brace saying 'fangs for the memory' to cinema's own Prince of Darkness.

A young couple are driving through the night in Italy when their car has a puncture. The husband urges his heavily pregnant wife to stay put while he searches for a phone. In the dark, the man plunges down a ditch at the edge of the road. He claws his way back up, covered from head to toe in muck, and trudges across muddy fields in search of help. Finally he reaches a house and knocks.

"The owner opened the door," recalls Christopher Lee, "took one look at me - this ghastly figure, obviously straight out of the grave - shrieked 'E lui!' and fainted." The unfortunate householder had been watching Lee play Count Dracula only the night before.

Lee is quick to add that things like that don't happen often. Despite making his name in such gore-blimey Hammer horrors as *The Mummy*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Face of Fu Manchu*, Lee has also played the likes of Scaramanga in *The Man with the Golden Gun*, Rochester in *The Three Musketeers* and, most recently, Jimnah, the founder of Pakistan, in a film of the same name. "I haven't done a horror film for 26 years," he stresses. But the fact that he is best known for his talent to scare is the cross he has to bear.

Now 75, Lee has been in show business for 50 years, clocking up 175 roles on the big screen and 60 on the small. He recently published an entertaining autobiography, *Tall,*

Dark and Gruesome, to coincide with the centenary of Bram Stoker's classic *Dracula* novel.

It's easy to see why Lee was originally cast as Vlad the bad. He's 6ft 4, with a sepulchral voice. "People probably don't think I have a smile or ever laugh," he says jauntily. "They don't realise that, to have played some of the roles I've played, you need a tremendous sense of humour and of the ridiculous. You have to know how far you can go in making the unbelievable believable. Walk over that line and you lose the audience's suspension of disbelief."

It was humour that he shared with his great friend Peter Cushing, with whom he starred in 22 films. When the two first met, on the set of *The Curse of Frankenstein*, Lee complained that he hadn't any lines. "You're lucky," Cushing replied. "I've read the script."

Patience and stamina proved essential for horror acting. In his time, Lee has burst through glass windows while clad only in exploding bandages; muscles have been torn from carrying a moribund maiden through a swamp with his arms fully extended; bird-eating spiders have strolled across his shoulders. He has thrashed through hawthorn bushes and been impaled enough times to rival any self-respecting pin cushion.

The uncle of actress Harriet Walter and cousin (through marriage) of author Ian Fleming, Lee comes from an extraordinary family. His mother, a beautiful Italian contessa, could trace her roots back 2,000 years. Her grandmother had been born in Britain, the daughter of a coachman; at 17, she had gone to Tasmania, met Lee's aristocratic great-grandfather, who had fled Italy, and married him. "She sang with her daughters in a covered wagon to the

miners and was called The Tasmanian Nightingale."

Lee's father (who abandoned his family when Lee was just four) was a professional soldier. "Lee is a gypsy name. The word comes from the old English word meaning wood."

Once, when the actor was filming in Ireland, a man with a nose "like a pharaoh" approached Lee, asking about the origins of his family. "I was a bit alarmed when I saw all these men, with their blue-black hair and dark skins, looking at me from the other end of the pub. But then they all started nodding when I said my name."

Lee didn't begin acting until after the war. His talent to entertain lay mainly in his ability to throw knives the way others throw darts. And, over the years, he has buckled his swash with the best of them. An Italian uncle, a diplomat known as Il Conte Rosso from his political leanings, suggested that his nephew become an actor. "It certainly wasn't a question of being dazzled by the glamour of it," says Lee.

This was just as well, for despite some first-rate chills like *The Wicker Man*, Lee's CV lists quite a few clunkers. He takes umbrage at the suggestion

that he may have "got stuck in rotten films". He says he always felt that the only way to learn the job was to do it. "Having been turned down for looking too foreign and too tall, I realised I had to take everything I was offered simply for the experience in front of the camera."

Thoughtfully stroking his silver beard, he adds: "I have been in some very indifferent films, but I don't know any actor who hasn't. I remember one very distinguished actor saying to me after two days on set, 'We've got ourselves into a terrible situation. This is crap. But we're going to make sure it's the best crap possible.'"

Lee's real break came in the late 1950s when Hammer started re-making in colour the black-and-white horror classics of the Thirties. It revived a genre that had once been a major part of the studios' output. For Lee, the secret of good horror is "terror without risk. The fact is that people know that, when they leave the cinema, it can't really happen. I never set out to terrify people. Never."

Lee quit making horror movies when he felt they were becoming "nauseating". Stakes through the heart are one thing, he says, severed eyeballs quite another. "In the films we did, you didn't see anything," Lee's old friend and colleague Boris Karloff used to tell him. "Leave it to the audience. They'll always think of something worse."

Those early Hammer films are now considered classics. At the time, though, they were dismissed as "vulgar", "repellent", "revolting". According to Lee, critics "had to eat their words. Hammer has been very influential, one of the most successful independent production companies of all time." *Dracula* grossed around \$75m and Universal's president once told Lee that it had saved the

company from bankruptcy.

"If you were to look at the history of films, you'd be surprised at some of the actors who have played in this kind of movie," Jack Nicholson was once the juvenile in films featuring Peter Lorre and Karloff; more recently, such stars as Ralph Richardson, Donald Sutherland and Charlotte Rampling have crept through crypts and vamped in vaults.

And not only actors have

been horrified. "Spielberg, De Palma, Scorsese, Coppola," says Lee, counting them off on his fingers. "They all told me the same thing: 'We were brought up on your movies.'"

If Lee has any regrets, it's that he never got to sing. The Swedish tenor Jussi Björling - the Placido Domingo of his day - once told him, "You've got the voice. You should do something with it."

Now Lee has at last re-

leased his first CD. On *Devils, Rogues and Other Villains*, the actor sings a collection of songs ranging from cowboy ballads to Russian opera arias. It's enough to make the Count writhe in his grave.

Christopher Lee stars in *Dracula - Prince of Darkness* at 11.05pm tomorrow on Channel 4. His autobiography, *Tall, Dark and Gruesome*, is published by Victor Gollancz at £15.99

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Andrew: "I want a puppy. Something cute and fluffy. Actually, I'd like a Rottweiler. Otherwise, I'd like a year's pass to the Odeon cinema, or a subscription to *Empire* magazine or *The Independent*.



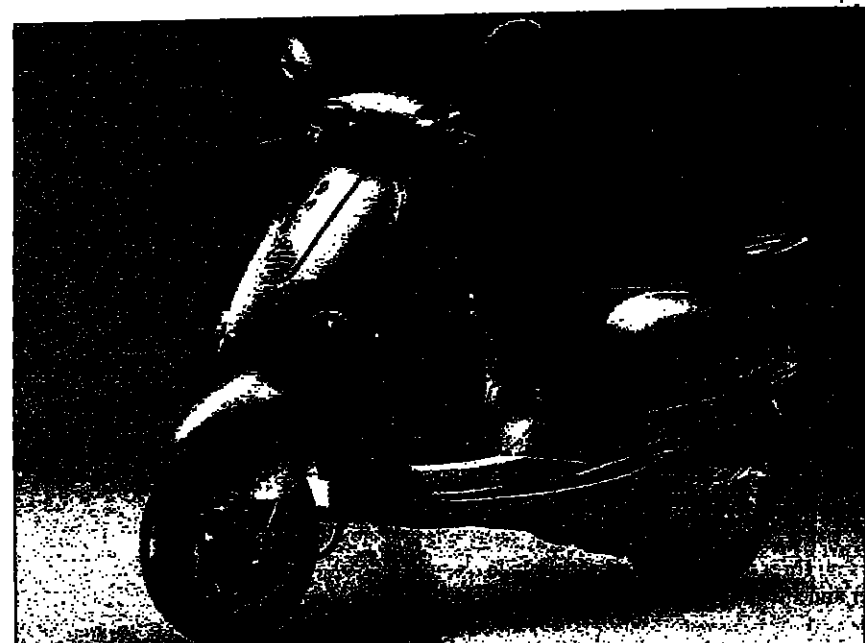
Bath cubes available from Boots the Chemist and leading department stores.



Owen Gaster, young designer
 "In my dreams I want a black Aston Martin Lagonda. from 1979. I saw one in Brighton and it made me go weak at the knees. I'd also quite like a cat, because I'm moving house and leaving my cats with my family. Or a chunky gold chain, maybe one from Adams."



Ally Capellino, designer and retailer
 "Apart from my holiday in Cuba, which I will be on by the time you read this, I would like a simple bikini top, maybe something from Liza Bruce."



Sonja Nuttall, young designer
 "I would love a cream Vespa Piaggio to get around on, but the only trouble is, if I get one of them I would need a Prada anorak and a bobble hat with matching mittens from Antoni & Alison too, not to mention a pair of chic goggles. If I can't have those I would love an Elsa Peretti fishbowl and two goldfish. My ultimate gift, however, is the one I got. My best friends have sent me off to a little Fijian island to relax, snorkel, play tennis and do nothing. As you read this I will be there, hopefully lying under a palm tree with a cocktail by my side reading *Robinson Crusoe* or something."



Paul Bernstock: "One dozen pairs of black cashmere socks and some Evisu jeans."

Evisu Jeans, £110, from Jones, Floral St, London, WC2, 0171-580 8600.



Tanya Sarne, chief designer, Ghost
 "I would like some sleep and peace and quiet. Santa are you listening?"

[illegible][illegible]

BELOVED AND I
Diary of a div

Suzie Hayman had been an only child for 40 years when she got the phone call: 'Hello, it's your sister Carol'

Suzie Hayman, agony aunt of 'Woman's Own', found she had a history as complex as anyone's she counsels, and it gets more complex as time goes on.

"Hello Suzie, it's your sister Carol" is a pretty ordinary way for a Sunday morning phone call to begin - except that I'm in my 40s and have spent my entire life as an only child. Carol's existence wasn't a total surprise - her ringing me was.

My parents divorced when I was three months old. Once, in passing, my mother said, "And another thing, I've never forgiven your father for giving Carol back." Excuse me? Who's Carol? I did manage to pick up that Carol was his daughter from a previous marriage, before the subject was closed, never to be mentioned again. When I was asked to appear, in my role as Agony Aunt, on an edition of *The Time, The Place* on television that dealt with getting in touch with lost relatives I found myself considering my own missing link.

One of the other "experts" was Colin Hircough of the Salvation Army Family Facing Service and when I said on air that I could not only understand but empathise with one woman's feelings because I, too, had never known my father, Colin asked me whether I would like to use their service to trace my father's side of my family. When I asked Colin to go ahead, he quickly confirmed that my father had been married before and had a daughter, Carol, from that earlier relationship. She was five years older than me but neither she nor my father could be traced in the UK. So he placed an ad in the *Johannesburg Star*, asking for any news about my father in his last known whereabouts. I didn't find my father, but my sister found me.

We talked on the phone and wrote to each other and then Carol made a flying visit for a short week, to the UK last September, to meet me and to visit her godmother Margaret, who was her mother's cousin. It was a strange, edgy week that left us with a new tie, wanting to keep in touch and know more. It also left me, thanks to Margaret, with the only full-face photo I've ever seen of our father. Three months ago, I returned the visit and travelled to South Africa, where I had been born and left over 35 years ago.

Both of us have been only children and both of us were brought up in almost total ignorance about our father. Carol had actually spent a year, when she was around three or four, living with our father and my mother before her own mother regained custody. But when her mother remarried Dad had never been mentioned again.

Both of us were, have been, are thrilled and intrigued at having a sister. She has a daughter and a son and all three can remember her interrupting a squabble of theirs once, to tell them one day they'd be grateful to have each other. It's interesting that we only describe each other as "half sisters" when explaining each other to other people. To each other, we're "sissies". She's the South African sissie born in England, I'm the English sissie born in South Africa.

Carol and I have enough physical likeness for it to be no surprise to anyone that we are sisters. When I met her mother, I thought I was seeing my own grandmother for a second. There's no doubt that people tend to be drawn to the same template, so it shouldn't be surprising that Carol's mother Jane and my mother, and so their daughters, share a strong physical resemblance.

I met my sister, and went to South Africa with very few preconceptions and without expecting much. I was very aware that both of us could have very conflicting ideas about what we wanted, anticipated or needed from any contact. I've talked to and heard from enough people who have run, arms wide, towards a lost relative to be met by horrified rejection or incomprehension, to know that this is a situation that has to be taken slowly, carefully and with frequent pauses for stock-taking.



Sister act: Suzie and Carol, above, reunited in England. Below left, Suzie with her mother Anne, leaving behind South Africa and, below right, Carol

What happened in our week together in Britain and our two weeks in South Africa wasn't all moonlight and roses, and what underlay some prickly moments was

dangers of expecting one thing and getting another. She had arranged a breath-taking, non-stop tour with lots of activity, and little pause for reflection. We had a

and aggressive, I think she's horribly lacking in assertiveness and confidence. Yet you can, I discover, have awful fights with a sibling and still be close. We're not friends, who you choose, but relatives, that you're landed with, and that actually feels good.

We went to several game reserves, which I'd missed out on doing the last time I was in South Africa, and we both laid and raised quite a few ghosts when we visited my grandparents' house in Johannesburg - a very atmospheric, melancholy and strange event. What did take me unawares was how much going back to South Africa would feel like going home.

Take the language. I hadn't realised the extent to which Afrikaans was also part of my vocabulary. I've always worn "takkies" rather than trainers. I tend to say "Shame" instead of "What a pity!" and found myself dropping into "Ach, sis" (another variant of the same) very quickly.

When someone said "Wagenbik" I did, because I knew it meant "Wait a minute", and when asked to look for the robot, knew it was a traffic light I was never

meant to find, not R2D2. I needed no translation or explanations when ordering brinjals or biltong, started (or resumed) thinking of anything I liked as "lekker" (nice, great, pleasant), and returned the greeting "Yebo" (Yes, or an all-encompassing "How's it going?" in both Siswati and Isuzulu) as if I'd been doing it all my life. As, I suppose, I had.

The reaction of friends has been illuminating. Some are thrilled, excited and delighted for me and intrigued to meet my new relatives. Some are wary, even shocked and appalled. One, who himself has an older half-sister in similar circumstances, is forceful in his insistence that he'd never want to meet her and that he can't understand why I should. As I pointed out, however, it's easy for him - he has a full sister and brother and grew up knowing what it's like to have siblings, I didn't.

I was more surprised by my husband Vic, who three weeks before I left suddenly said this isn't something he'd have done. I was taken aback because he has been so supportive, so pleased for me.

He's been unstintingly generous in urging me to spend so much of our money on my trip. But he was honest in pointing out, as I don't think I quite appreciated, how little he does or can, share how I feel. But then Vic, too, has a brother and was brought up with all the drawbacks and negatives of sibling rivalry and jealousy. He has the baggage of having a brother and not being able to remember anything positive about that bond while I have the baggage of having no one.

I went back to South Africa to meet a family I hadn't known I had - a half sister, a niece and a nephew. In the process I recovered parts of myself I hadn't realised I missed, and found exactly what I always thought siblings provide for each other - a mirror image, that can be reassuring as well as disconcerting and sometimes uncomfortable; a link and sense of belonging, some companionship, some emulation, some competition. We have startling parallels in our lives and our likes and dislikes, and some tastes that are worlds apart. But we are sisters, and that's new to me, and fun.



something we should have anticipated. Just because Carol had welcomed contact, was older than me and just as intelligent, didn't mean we were both aware of the

spectacular bust-up on my last-but-one day, which in retrospect I could see coming. But even this was new and reassuring. She thinks I'm frighteningly competitive



BELOVED AND BONK Diary of a divorce

I'm getting a decree absolute for Christmas. It's through on Christmas Eve and I don't know how I'm going to feel. I have this nasty suspicion that there is one more pothole of grief into which I must fall and get soaked and muddy before the whole deal is over. Probably at around 5am on the 25th when I wake up with a hangover, alone on Christmas morning for the first time in 18 years. But not really alone because I'll probably have Buster and Bunny in bed with me, making the most of my new Very Nice Chap's absence to wrap themselves around my body.

Very Nice Chap (hereafter VNC), being young and unmarried, is going home for Christmas to be with his parents. At least my decree absolute will do a bit of good there, removing some of my status as Female

Predator. Because, let's face it, on the list of parental nightmares, older married women with children come somewhere around drunken car crashes and bit parts in *Trainspotting*. At least as a divorcee I will no longer be forcing their little lad into adultery. In an attempt to convince VNC's parents that I wasn't biting him into pieces to be consumed at my leisure we went to visit at the weekend. VNC was confident that meeting me would give them a nervous breakdown. I'm no good at not swearing or laying off tasteless jokes about the Royal Family for two hours let alone two days.

By the time the long drive Up North was done I was almost speechless with nerves. "I'm 39 years old," I squeaked to my

self inside. "I'm an adult." But my identity as an adult seemed to have dropped out of the car going over the Humber Bridge. I was 12 years old and up before the headmistress for being very naughty indeed.

We arrived. Parked. Stepped out into the frosty street. I had expected something dour, grey and post-industrial. A place where even the architecture would label me as a bohemian Southerner with the moral fibre of a slipper limpet (*Crepidula fornicata*). What I found was that I had entered a Janet Arlberg world where every red brick in every house had its place and was glowing with friendliness. The Boddli Minister peeping over the rooftops, the yellow light in the windows and the clipped icy trees in the front gardens, all said this is a

place where everything is as it should be. This is a place where all families stay together, where the milk is delivered in time for breakfast and there is always cake for tea. This was the place that had made VNC into a VNC. Where magical childhood stuff happened all the time without anyone having to flash a Mastercard, or plan it for three months in advance.

VNC walked up the path in the middle of the front garden, to a door in the middle of the house. He walked in without key or knocking, rightly certain of the welcome we'd get: warm. Open. Not the armed combat you have waiting to offer Parental Nightmare number 23. And then I was in danger of weeping my way across the threshold. This is what I had wanted for my kids dammit.

This feeling of safety and rightness. This is what I'd have liked myself, a parental front door still open in adulthood to go through without question. A place where you could go and make yourself toast and Marmite at bedtime but still be told off about putting your feet on the furniture.

So anyway, I stopped being nervous and began to enjoy a weekend off being an adult. A weekend staying with somebody else's Mummy and Daddy who are just like your own Mummy and Daddy only nicer (or in my case alive). I ate roast and gravy, played whist, spent ages in the bath and was flooded with the stories of another family: the time VNC grew a giant pumpkin, the time his sister nearly fell down Snowden, the time his Mum had hyster-

ics burying a rat and his dad climbed on the roof of Beverly Races. I even enjoyed sleeping alone in the spare room while VNC was tucked up in his old bed next door. Saying good night with smouldering repressed passion at the bedroom door is something I haven't experienced since I was 17. As a fuel for the first months of a new relationship I'd rate it along with the stuff they use to get rockets into orbit. Tucked up under my rose petal quilt and dressed in the only nightie I could find at home which approaches virginal, I let the long-term homely rightness of the house sink into me. And prayed to the God of rose petal quilts and trellis wallpaper that second time around I could build a little of this world for myself.

Stevie Morgan



On the unseemly death of a pet

RUPERT
CORNWELL
THE RUNT OF
THE LITTER

Six predictive

HAMISH
MORAE
THE COMING
RECESSION

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On the unseasonal death of a pet



RUPERT CORNWELL
THE RUNT OF THE LITTER

My eight-year-old son had always wanted a pet, and the plan had been in the works for more than a year, ever since we knew we would be returning from America. Obviously, given Britain's savage quarantine laws, it was pointless to do anything before we got here. But once established in a new home, we would howl to the ceaseless pressure and buy him one. He plumped for a kitten – and what better present to mark his first Christmas in England? But this is a most unChristmassy tale of a plan which went tragically wrong.

Now kittens are not that easy to find in mid-December. Nature's ancestral mechanisms, apparently, arrange things so that cats tend not to give birth when the weather is cold. But a pet shop in Bromley did have some for sale. And so last Wednesday my wife and son returned from a short expedition to suburban Kent with the required paraphernalia of cat ownership: a cosy padded basket, pet food, litter boxes, a scratching pole and, most important, one tiny, adorable kitten. She was seven weeks old and the runt of the litter, scarcely longer than the outstretched palm of a hand. No modish names for her. Fluffy, the little boy insisted, and Fluffy she was called. And that should have been that. A child's wish comes true! and a little furry creature, scarcely longer than an outstretched hand, lives happily ever after.

And for a couple of days everything was fine. Fluffy did exactly what kittens are supposed to do. She crawled all over us, played with bits of string, and chased her own shadow. She purred louder than a buzzsaw and flopped her way up the steps of a staircase just like the puppies in *Lady and the Tramp*. My son was in seventh heaven. But then the problems started.

First she wouldn't eat. Then she would – only to develop diarrhoea. We called the vet. Put her on water for a day, he advised. We did, and Fluffy seemed to regain her spirits. By Sunday evening she was weak, but once more eager for food. A good sign, we thought, and went to bed relieved. Overnight however, she was struck down.

The next morning she was so feeble could not stand, her four legs splaying out beneath her each time she tried. So my son held her on his lap and stroked her, as we tried on the vet's advice to at least get some water down her. But it was plainly too late. By now Fluffy was emitting rasping coughs that made her tiny body shudder. If there's such a thing as a death rattle, that was it.

Nor was there anything to be done at the vet's. Fluffy was too small to take a drip. My wife and son went home to go through the motions of preparing for Christmas, while waiting for the inevitable news. In mid-afternoon the phone rang. Fluffy had not made it. The vet did not know what she had died of, but told us we could have an autopsy carried out if we wanted. We did not. He then asked if we wanted the body. We did.

And so on a dank and dark winter's evening, Fluffy was buried at the bottom of a muddy garden in south London. Four feet deep, the vet had recommended, otherwise the foxes common to those parts might get to her. But try digging a four foot hole. My wife managed but half of that, before laying the tiny cadaver to rest in a biscuit box. Prayers were said. My son phoned me in the office to instruct me to bring some flowers when I came home that evening. I returned armed with a bunch of chrysanthemums from the garage over the road. Later, in a second ceremony, we solemnly laid them on the grave.

From the conventional perspective of Christmas, I suppose, it was better that if she was going to die, she went quickly. What would more comprehensively wreck the season of merry-making, than an extended deathbed agony that might have lasted until Christmas Day itself? Wasn't Christmas meant to be about children being happy?

A couple of days on however, I have to admit, this domestic calamity has acquired a not unwelcome astringency. It's more than 20 years since I spent Christmas in England, and I'd forgotten how, more than any nation on earth, we've turned Christianity's second festival into a saccharine-clad suspension of reality. Fluffy's brief existence *chez* the Cornwells began as part of the illusion. By the end though, she was a reminder of how even in this week life goes on. We have constructed a three-week carnival of self-indulgence around the tale of an infant's miraculous birth 2,000 years ago. In the real world however, people and pets not only are born over Christmas. They also die then. But enough of moralising. My son said it was the saddest moment of his life. For a couple of adults too, it came close. One way and another, we won't quickly forget this first Christmas back.



Pupils from the Royal Ballet School rehearsing yesterday for 'Peter and the Wolf' at the Royal Festival Hall, London

Photograph: Nigel Norrington

Pantomimes, holly, roast turkey – we are enslaved by the fantasy of a real Christmas



SUZANNE MOORE
POST-MODERN RITUALS

They started in October. "Please Mum" begged my children. "Please, this year can we have a real Christmas?" "Not like last year," they chorused. Last year we spent Christmas in Bethlehem which, according to my kids, was "not Christmassy enough". I know what they meant. Sure, He might have been born there but a couple of straggly attempts at a Christmas tree, one string of fairy lights and an enormous poster of Yasser Arafat cannot compete with the wonders of Wood Green Shopping City.

One of the results of their gloriously multi-cultural education is that neither of my children seem to realise that Christmas might have anything

to do with Christianity. The fact that Bethlehem is in Arab territory they felt was no excuse for this poor show. Although they can recite the legend of Rama and Sita in great detail they tend to regard all religious festivals as largely secular events, with Christmas just being the biggest and the best.

Anyway, this year they are going to get their real Christmas as they have grounded me. No exotic destinations for us. No we are going to do it properly. Whatever that means. For as I leaf through the Christmas schedules and catalogues, I notice how often the word *real* crops up. I have watched Gabby Roslin's *Real Christmas* show, in which ordinary people video their Christmas and then talk about them afterwards. This was the saddest thing I have seen all year. I also see there is a programme called *Nigel Slater's Real Christmas Dinner* giving us the real taste of Christmas. I have bought "Real" Christmas crackers and a real tree and, like every other woman I know, I am exhausted rushing around to provide this level of realism for my family.

Yesterday, under seasonal strain in the supermarket, I cracked. I bought everything that I could that was ready-made, pre-prepared, "just needs heating". So I notice, did

many of the other bad-tempered trolley zombies, who whisper to each other in the aisles about the madness that has overtaken them. Yet I wonder what all this emphasis on realism is about. What does our anxiety about having a real Christmas betray? What happens to you if you fail in the "Real Christmas" stakes? Are you a lesser, sadder person? What is it that propels so many of us to try and replicate what is not actually a "real", but an imaginary Christmas that only exists somewhere in our minds and on our Christmas cards?

It is not simply that we want to recreate the Christmas of our childhoods, for even then I remember feeling that other families did it better than mine, that we were somehow failing. No, we want to create a Christmas that belongs to some collective memory which is not actually our own but lodged deep in the culture. That memory of a Christmas that is rural, communal, spontaneous is the exact opposite to what most of end up with.

Christmas may be a public holiday but it is privatised ritual. We each sit in our own little households, all doing much the same stuff and imagining that someone out there is doing it all perfectly, that their Christmas is somehow the real thing. Those who are too poor

or too alone or too depressed are non-starters in the real Christmas stakes. They are immediately disqualified. So how would we categorise the Christmas that don't make the grade? The antithesis of the real Christmas of the imagination? How many of us endure False Christmases. Noels that are not quite good enough?

For isn't that the commonest complaint about the whole damn enterprise. It has been removed from its roots, it's too commercial, it doesn't mean anything any more, it goes on too long, it's just about consumerism, the meaning has been sucked out. We yearn for it all to mean something, something secular and acceptable, something about feelings instead of objects, about people instead of profit. And we look for the odd glimmer of this, as if to reassure ourselves that all the material crassness cannot entirely drain the event of some deeper meaning.

Yet instead of complaining the idea that Christmas isn't like it used to be, why can't we just accept that it is a simulacrum, a simulation, a copy, of something for which there is no original? Then we could worry less about whether it is all real enough or whether it is all too artificial, and accept it for the bizarre post-modern mish-mash that it is. There is almost

nothing about Christmas which is authentic, so why pretend otherwise?

The meat that most of us will eat has come from birds whose breasts have been so genetically enlarged that they cannot stand up by themselves. The traditions we make so much of, from Father Christmas onwards, are all modern inventions less than a hundred years old. Most of us will organise our Christmas dinner not around the church service but around what is on television.

Just how sticky post-modern the whole thing has become was brought home to me last week at a pantomime. Those who think that pantos are packed with rich vaudevillean tradition should think again. Their references are not to theatre but to TV, with their B-list celebs, jokes about Sky Television and, I'm afraid, Dennis Waterman singing the theme tune from *Minder* – *I Could Be So Good For You* – in the middle of *Aladdin*. This pantomime consisted of a number of ill-fitting

themes woven together. No one seems to mind if the joins are visible: throw in a bit of soap opera, a bit of Chinese legend, a bit of pop culture, a bit of Disney and hey you have a show.

The same could be said of the modern Christmas, which is a jumble of themes and sentiments parceled up together. Let's not kid ourselves there is any great continuity with the past. A contemporary Yule is really something of a pick-and-mix experience. We take the things we want, don't bother with what we don't. What is oppressive is trying to do it all and do it all right. I say let it go. Why can't we do some of it wrong?

Once we liberate ourselves from the idea of a real Christmas then we can revel in our fakes ones, genuinely enjoying the inauthentic, the artificial, the unnatural. Herein lies the true spirit of Christmas, which is that we make the whole thing up. Over and over again. So here's wishing you all a truly unreal Christmas and a magical new year.

Six predictions from five years past, and six for the future



HAMISH McRAE
THE COMING RECESSION

People in the prediction business rarely check back on their past performance – so I am grateful to a reader who has sent me a copy of an article I wrote in December 1992 giving half a dozen ideas that were deeply unfashionable then, but which seemed to be "decent odds-on bets" for 1997. The result? Several near bull-eyes, one poor shot and one catastrophe.

We had just been ejected unceremoniously from the ERM and were still in the midst of recession, so the first prediction – that Britain was entering a period of relative prosperity "when the country will gain ground in terms of economic growth against the rest of Europe" – did seem a bit extreme. Actually we have done even better, for every single year since 1992 we have grown faster than France and Germany, and in four out of the five years faster than Italy too.

The other two big macro-economic forecasts

have also stood up pretty well. World inflation would head down and "by the last years of the century (maybe by 1997, but it could take a little longer) Britain will have as near zero inflation as makes no difference". Maybe we do have to wait a little longer, but the latest projection for the UK GDP deflator – the best measure of overall inflation in an economy – is 2.5 per cent, and for the G7 economies, 1.7 per cent. Not quite there, but heading in the right direction.

As for unemployment, we have done even better than the "less than 6 per cent by 1997, below the European average" that I expected. Even if the official unemployment total of 5.1 per cent overstates the fall, this is still remarkable; I don't think, on the other hand, I had fully grasped the possibility that European unemployment would rise by as much as it has.

There were two micro-economic forecasts, one of which I got right, the other wrong. The one which was right was that house prices would not soar "although they may rise a little in money terms, say by about 15 per cent over the next five years". The actual rise in the Halifax house price index from the last quarter of 1992 to November 1997 (the latest figure) I calculate at a little under 14 per cent, but would admit hitting that one so close was a bit of a fluke.

I missed the other specific projection: that Britain would have the second largest car industry in Europe after Germany, thanks to the build-up of Japanese manufacturers. Production has risen and we are ahead of Italy, but we are still far behind France, as well as Germany.

The other and worse miss was the one political prediction I made. Given the success of the economy and the divided opposition, I thought that the Tories would be safe for another term and I predicted "a Tory majority of 45 in October 1996". Hopeless. My only defence

is that at the time John Smith was still leader of the Opposition and I did not appreciate that the voters might be offered Tory economic policies by a Labour leader. My colleagues unkindly suggest that I should stick to economic predictions and leave the politics to others.

That is the track record: what of the future – the year 2002 – following the same pattern of five economic predictions and one political one? It is much harder, largely because in 1992 things were so dreadful that they had to get better, whereas now the domestic economy seems OK, but there are powerful external uncertainties that are very difficult to call.

Starting from a global viewpoint, it does seem clear that we are now definitely in a period of global deflation, so prediction number one is that some of the G7 countries, probably including Britain, will experience falling price levels at some stage in the next five years.

Does that also mean global recession? Not necessarily, but I think the balance of probability is that there will indeed be another world recession in the early part of the next century. The end of the long American boom, the deflationary forces from East Asia, the uncertainty associated with the introduction of a single currency in Europe and the Millennium computer bug will combine to make another world recession probable before 2002 – prediction number two. We may be less hard hit than most, particularly if we have remained outside the single currency, but we will still be affected.

Will the "euro" happen? I suppose that the probability is that it will, but I do not believe this is the certainty that European politicians currently think. If it happens, I am sure that it will collapse; but I don't think collapse will come immediately, because initially the political glue will be too strong. Collapse

will come in 10 or 15 years' time, not five.

Prediction number three concerns unemployment. Managing the UK economy through global recession will be difficult, particularly so for an inexperienced UK government that is bound to make mistakes. It would be surprising if unemployment were not higher in 2002 than it is now, though I would expect it still to be below continental levels.

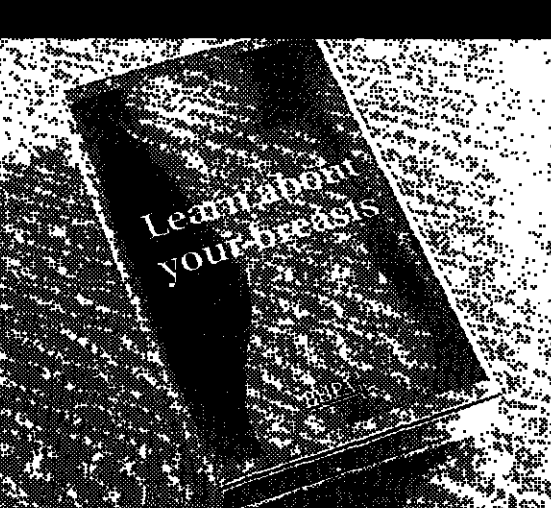
Meanwhile the shape of the economy will continue to change, with such industries as communications and entertainment continuing to grow while manufacturing continues to shrink. So prediction number four is that employment in manufacturing will be lower in 2002 than in 1997, despite general economic growth.

Number five is the positive side of that: we will have increased world market share in the communications and entertainment industries. As a result physical trade with the European Union will have become less important relative to service trade with the rest of the world. The economy will be slowly reorienting itself away from Europe, not for any political reason but because ties of language and culture are becoming more important in trade than physical proximity.

And six? This general picture is one of the UK continuing to do quite well relative to other developed countries, but having to struggle into the head-wind of the post-Millennial economic slump. The present Government will, inevitably, catch some of the blame, but I do not think the electorate will be sufficiently miserable yet to want to throw it out of office. That comes in 2005. So yes, I envisage Labour getting back with a majority of 45 in October 2001.

And if that, given my past performance, seems the kiss of death for Mr Blair and his colleagues – sorry.

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14/OBITUARIES

Dawn Steel

Dawn Steel, film producer:
born New York 19 August
1946; married 1975 Ronald
Rothstein (marriage
dissolved), 1984 Charles
Roven (one daughter); died
Los Angeles 20 December
1997.

It is hard to imagine a Hollywood without Dawn Steel, the New York vulgarism workaholic who rose to the uppermost echelons of, respectively, Paramount, Columbia and Disney. Famed for her "big hair", and many would add her big mouth, Steel was an atypical brash New York Jew, a marketing merchant who applied a hard-sell technique to the movie business. Neither agent nor movie boss, nor graduate of any East Coast business school, Steel rose to the top of a particularly slippery pole, as a female executive in a resolutely man's world, and helped, inadvertently, to free up top industry positions to women. Her roll call of films - love 'em or loathe 'em - defined the look of the New Hollywood, every inch as vulgar as the old, albeit lacking the former's sense of taste and genuine style, and in so doing created the populist culture of incoming generations, also by the by generating an awful lot of hard cash for an ever-inflationary industry.

Steel was born in 1946 on Manhattan's Upper West Side, the daughter of second-generation Jewish immigrants who met at a dance at 92nd Street Y. The family name was, ironically, Spielberg, but her father was a musician body-builder who called himself Nat Steel, and it became the family moniker. Her father's eventual breakdown led to a troubled and impoverished childhood, and she worked her way through both Boston and New York Universities, studying marketing at the latter's School of Commerce, working as a bookkeeper in the evenings.

Steel never finished her schooling and in 1968 began full-time employment, determined not to be a mere receptionist or secretary in an era when women were fighting for equal position in the work-

force. She fetched up at Stadia Publishing in New York, sent to cover a Giants football game at Yankee Stadium, garnering a place for herself in her own press box on behalf of the *National Football League Digest*, knowing nothing about football and commenting on the costumes that the Vikings were wearing: it was a stop-at-nothing approach that would serve her well in Hollywood.

Steel worked for *Penthouse* magazine as merchandiser, placing *Penthouse* logos everywhere, aping *Playboy*, and trailed the world searching for apt products. In Frankfurt she secured the rights to a hand-knitted item that she successfully marketed as a Cock Sock: her next big success, in tandem with her first husband Ronnie Rothstein, was the wholesale sale of Dutch bulbs, marketing amaryllis as "Penis Plants" with the slogan "Grow Your Own Penis - all it takes is \$6.98 and a lot of love".

Steel's next big success outlasted her marriage: toilet paper embossed with a symbol suspiciously similar to the interlocked "G" of Gucci. Gucci sued, but Steel continued to produce designer toilet paper, utilising such items as *The Book of Lists* and *The Dieter's Guide to Weight Loss During Sex*. Such shameless marketing triumphs could only end her up in one place.

Her marriage over, her only ambition to open a gift store in Greenwich Village. Steel was invited out to Los Angeles by a friend, a junior production executive at Paramount, who realised that if Steel could market Penis Plants and Designer Toilet Paper, she was ready for movies. For Steel's part, she had been inspired by the 1976 film *Rocky*, a movie about the will to succeed, and her personal taste inclined to *Doctor Zhivago* and *The Godfather*, but she had no filmic consciousness to speak of. In the cynical words of the *Los Angeles Times* columnist Jack Matthews: "Marketing designer toilet paper seems as good a background for success in Hollywood as anything else."

Steel's move on Hollywood was as swift as it was unpredictable. The Paramount powerbroker Michael Eisner



Steel: 'Hell on heels' or the American career woman par excellence

(later "whiz-king" at Disney) hired Steel immediately after she related to him her life story to date ("It's a television series like *Rhoda*," Eisner is alleged to have said - "the Dawn Steel story starring Penny Marshall"), and put her on to marketing Mork and Mindy merchandise. Given *Star Trek* - *The Movie* to market, and denied access to the unfinished film, Steel put on a spectacular show utilising the whole Enter-

prise cast, which was beamed on to the main Paramount theatre stage via lasers, and successfully ended up with Klingsons promoting McDonald's and Coca-Cola. Eisner was so impressed he immediately promoted Steel to Vice-President of Feature Production, and so, quite literally, a Hollywood legend was born.

Despite the myth, Steel wasn't quite the first woman to run production. By 1980 Sher-

ry Lansing was already President of 20th Century-Fox, and both Zootrope and United Artists had female executives. But Steel's own personal publicity was considerable, and her rise undeniably swift, and by 1983 she had become Senior Vice-President, Production, at Paramount, her position preceded by her reputation and a variety of nicknames: "Hell on heels", for instance, or the "Queen of Mean".

"Abrasive" would be too mild a word for a woman who changed secretaries on a monthly basis, but the style suited her immediate boss, the equally abrasive Don Simpson. Under Simpson, Steel found and produced *Flashdance* (1983) - a rite, novelette-ish fantasy flick she parlayed through three writers (with one of whom, Tom Hedley, she had a torrid affair) into a fast-moving, energetic, identifiable smash hit. It cost \$7m and took \$90m domestic, and began the now-common device of marketing theatrical features via pop promos on MTV. Steel followed *Flashdance* with a virtual clone, *Footloose* (1984), an equally artless smash hit.

Steel's star was on the rise, as was her image. She was becoming perceived as the American career woman par excellence. In 1983 she met and embarked on a long and torrid romance with the director Martin Scorsese, and learnt about the cinema. It was Scorsese who urged Steel to turn a current news story into a movie and the result was *The Accused* (1988), which won an Academy Award for Jodie Foster. It was also Scorsese who introduced Steel to another aspect of film culture: Steel loved to relate how, prior to playing *Trivial Pursuit* with Scorsese, Steven Spielberg and Ingmar Bergman, no less, she stayed up the night before memorising the cards.

Steel's formidable presence was responsible for a slew of popular successes at Paramount: she continued working with the *Flashdance* director Adrian Lyne on the box-office success *Fatal Attraction* (1987), forging a working relationship with that film's star, Michael Douglas, and immensely aided the success of the action movie *Top Gun* (1986) by astutely suggesting that, since the star Tom Cruise was the film's main attraction, all flying masks be dropped from the character's faces as often as possible, and where such masks were absolutely necessary, the character's name was to be written on their helmets. Realistic? Who cares - in marketing terms a major triumph.

But Steel's personal publicity was making enemies at corporate Paramount, and while actually greeting her new husband, Chuck Roven, after the birth in 1989 of her baby Rebecca, she learnt from a headline in *Variety* in Roven's pocket that she was no longer President of Production at the studio.

However, the head of Columbia, David Puttnam, had managed in his all-too-brief tenure to upset, offend, and generally rile agents and management at Paramount's sister studio, and the Columbia powerbrokers Ray Stark, Victor Kaufman and Herbert Allen offered the prime position to Steel. In her candid and ad-

monitory 1993 autobiography *They Can Kill You But They Can't Eat You* Dawn Steel states that it was the call of her life, the proverbial offer she couldn't refuse, and on 28 October 1987 Dawn Steel became President of Columbia Pictures, effectively the first woman to head a major Hollywood studio.

The very antithesis of Puttnam, Steel had the extraordinarily difficult task of mending nets, bringing back into the Columbia field movies that Puttnam had no interest in: films like *Ghostbusters II* and *The Karate Kid III* (both 1989). Steel is on record as saying that David Puttnam thought these sequels were just crass and commercial movies. "To us, they were unmined gems."

Also at Columbia, Steel restored David Lean's epic *Lawrence of Arabia* and turned the 1962 film into a successful 1989 re-release, on the advice of her former lover Martin Scorsese. The nine-Oscar winner *The Last Emperor* (1987) also, as Steel put it, fell into her lap. Steel's Columbia regime began to reek of prestige product and box-office hits: *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1989), *Postcards From the Edge* (1990), *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), plus *Look Who's Talking* (1989) and its two sequels.

Many of the Puttnam-instigated titles were tried, and failed, and left a crippling legacy of celluloid. Columbia became ripe for takeover. On 25 September 1989 Victor Kaufman called Dawn Steel at 7am and announced that the company had been sold to Sony, and

by 1991 Steel had sealed her contract at Columbia, leaving *Flatliners* and *Awakenings* (both 1990) as her last two movies there.

Livited by Michael Eisner, who had first started her in the business, to join him at Disney, Steel didn't hesitate, and finally achieved that which was denied her previously: no title, plus her name on the credits of her own movies. (Traditionally, Hollywood studio executives take no credit on their own films.) Her first self-produced film was Disney's most successful: a 1993 release *Cool Runnings*, with a world-wide theatrical gross take of over \$140m, and her own outfit, Steel Pictures, also produced *Honey I Shrunk the Kid* (1992) and *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit* (1993), both tremendously successful.

It was a matter of time before Dawn Steel was courted by the mogul of moguls, Ted Turner, but Steel demanded complete autonomy before accepting Turner's offer as Chairman and Chief Executive, and negotiations collapsed, only to re-surface in 1994 when, as Atlas Entertainment (named for her father Nat Steel, who performed as "Mr Atlas"), she struck a first-look, multi-year production agreement with Turner Pictures, a 10-feature slate jointly funded by Britain's BBC, France's TF1, and Germany's TeleMunchen.

But rumours started to circulate in Los Angeles about Steel's health, and the family issued a wish for personal respect on behalf of the press, such as Steel's standing in the Hollywood community, this wish was observed. Although she had been heavily active with 12 Monkeys (1995) and *Angus* (also 1995), the *New York Post* broke the silence in 1996 with the news that Dawn Steel had an inoperable brain tumour.

Steel dealt with the revelation by immediately hiring the director Gregory Hoblit to helm her new Denzel Washington-starrer, *Fallen*, which, with *City of Angels*, starring Meg Ryan and Nicolas Cage, will premiere in early 1998. Hollywood's First Lady, Dawn Steel, will not be around to see them open.

- Tony Sloman

Professor R. V. Jones

M. R. D. Foot's obituary of R. V. Jones [19 December] inevitably concentrated on his outstanding contribution to winning the war. I write as one of the thousands of students who were taught by him, writes Roger Lindsay.

"R.V." is first-year Natural Philosophy course at Aberdeen taken by all Science, Engineering and medical students was the most wonderful mind-opening experience. It is the part, above all, of my degree course that I have had cause to recall; rarely for facts and always for approach. Intellectual rigour was central to all he did. Early

on he emphasised to us "Occam's Razor", which, simply stated, says: "Accept the simplest explanation that fits all the facts at your disposal."

Whilst the science was rigorous, the lectures were FUN and many of them memorable for the way in which the practical demonstration lifted any clouds of misunderstanding and seared the principle on to the brain. Like the experiment to measure the speed of a bullet for which in front of an astonished audience he drew a service revolver from the folds of his gown and drilled the two rotating discs at the other end of

the bench. The gunshot and the applause were deafening.

A full first-year turn-out of perhaps 200 students could be quite high-spirited. On one occasion a comet began to be blown sporadically and tunelessly at the back of the theatre. Eventually and a little gruffly, R.V. called the comet-holder to descend to the front and then confiscated the instrument - but not before giving us a solo that would have done Louis Armstrong proud.

Another measure of his range, humour, concern for lucidity of thought and understanding of scientific principle

came in his exam questions. For example, "If action and reaction are equal and opposite" (an oft-stated principle in physics), "how does a horse pull a cart?" Or, "If you have studied past Physics exam papers and observed any trends in the types of questions, state what the trend was, then set your own question and answer it."

In 1979, after watching a natural history television film of a sidewinder snake moving speedily across a desert at right angles to the direction pointed by its head, I thought to write to R.V. suggesting that explaining the movement of the

sidewinder would make an excellent exam question. But I should have known! After kindly thanking me for my suggestion and clearly explaining in a few words what we both had seen on television and I had not understood, he revealed that he had anticipated my thought by some 30 years.

In 1949 he had set the following question: "There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: 'The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid'." Proverbs xix.18-19

What explanation would you give to Solomon for any three of the foregoing?

As a good Intelligence Officer, R. V. Jones stood by Occam's Razor, writes A. B. Sansbury. He also perceived the truth of another law, defined by his colleague John Crow - "Do not believe what you wish to believe until you perceive what you ought to have perceived."

And then - and here whimsicality took over - he adumbrated Crabtree's Bludgeon, a fearful blunting of Occam's Razor: "No set of mutually inconsistent observations can ex-

ist for which some human intellect cannot conceive a coherent explanation, however complicated." In which case, he observed, all the Intelligence Officers can do is to stand by Occam. But Crabtree? Unmentioned by obituaries so far, he was Jones's greatest spoof, though his genesis was shared with a number of contemporaries, including a distinguished Professor of German and a subsequent Public Orator of London University.

He and his cronies at the Athenaeum created a fictitious character, 44 Christmases ago, as a joke on the literary frater-

nity to see how many of them would be honest enough to acknowledge that they had never heard of him. He is still commemorated by the annual Crabtree Oration, and it was for this some years ago that Jones mused on

the human tendency to seek complicated explanations that I have often seen in intelligence committees and elsewhere. It almost became necessary in Crabtree's case because, although we early orators took great care never to have Crabtree in two places at the same time, subsequent orators sometimes threw such caution to the winds

- which led to some bludgeoning.

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS

DEATHS

IRVINE, Elizabeth (Betty), former Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of York, died peacefully in hospital after a short illness on 21 December (aged 91). Much-loved mother of Chris, and grandmother of Ben, Joely, Alex and Louise. Funeral at Golder Green Crematorium on 27 December at 11am. Friends welcome, donations if desired to Oxfam.

IN MEMORIAM

PARIKIAN: In loving memory of Manouk Parikian, who died on Christmas Eve 1987.

Announcements for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries, In Memoriam) should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1, Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephoned to 071-293 2012 (24-hour answering machine 071-293 2011) or faxed to 071-293 2010, and are charged at £4.50 a line (VAT extra). OTHER Gazette announcements (notices, functions, forthcoming marriages, Marriages) must be submitted in writing and are charged at £10 a line, VAT extra. Please include a daytime telephone number.

The OBITUARIES e-mail address is obituaries@independent.co.uk

Birthdays

CHRISTMAS EVE: Mr Alistair Baillie, former diplomat, 65; Mrs Mair Barnes, former managing director, Woolworths, 53; Mr John Barron, actor, 77; Professor Anthony Clare, psychiatrist, 55; Sir Colin Cowdrey, former cricketer, 65; Sir Gerald Elliot, former chairman, Christian Salvages, 74; Mr Jeremy Handley, horse-racing trainer, 54; Sir James Hodge, ambassador to Thailand, 55; Ms Helen Jones MR 43; Dame Joan Kellagher, former Director, WRAC, 52; Sir Ivan Larmour QC, former MP, 61; Dr John Marek MP, 57; Miss Mary Menkes, fashion editor, *International Herald Tribune*, 54; Miss Thea Porter, fashion designer, 70; Mr Norman Rossington, actor, 69; Mr John D. Taylor MR 60; Miss Carol Vorderman, broadcaster and writer, 37; Mr Philip Ziegler, author and editor, 68.

CHRISTMAS DAY: Princess Alexandra, 61; Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, 96; Lord Auman, author, 91; Miss Sheila Browne, former Principal, Newnham College, Cambridge, 73; Professor Sir Kenneth Colman, chief medical officer, Department of Health, 56; Mr Quentin Crisp, writer and performer, 89; Mr Edward Davey MP, 32; Ms Barbara Follett MP, 55; Professor Christopher Frayling, Rector and Vice-Provost, Royal College of Art, 51; Lord Grade, chairman, the Grade Company, 91; The Right Rev Noel Jones, Bishop of Sodor and Man, 65; Miss Anne Lennox, singer, 43; Professor Philip Love, Vice-Chancellor, Liverpool University, 58; Mr Tony Martin, singer and actor, 54; Sir Peter Matthews, former Chief Constable of Surrey, 80; Mr Ismail Merchant, film producer, 61; Professor Phyllida Parlove, former Warden of Wills Hall, Bristol University, 67; Mr Laurie Quinn MR 41; Mr Noel Redding, rock musician, 52; Mr John

Sharman, former High Commissioner to the Seychelles, 60; Lord Sheppard of Didsbury, former chairman, Grand Metropolitan, 65; Miss Sissy Spacek, actress, 48; Mr Nigel Stanner-Smith, sports commentator, 53; Sir Noel Stockdale, life president of the Asda group, 77; Mr Stephen Twigge MP, 31; The Right Rev Benjamin Vaughan, former Bishop of Swansea and Brecon, 80; Sir Cairn 1871; Ahmed ben Zogga (later King Zog) overthrew the Albanian government and proclaimed a republic, 1924. Today is Christmas Eve and the Feast Day of St Adela, St Delphinus, St Gregory of Spoleto, St Irmina, St Sharbel Makhlof and Saints Tharsilla and Emilianas.

CHRISTMAS DAY: Births: Sir Isaac Newton, mathematician, physicist and astronomer, 1642; Humphrey DeForest Bogart, actor, 1899. Deaths: W.C. Fields (William Claude Dukerfeld), comedian, 1946; St Charles Spencer Chaplin, comedian, 1977; Nicolas Cousseau, former Romanian president, executed by firing squad 1989. On this day: Verd's *Aida* was first performed, Cairo 1871; Ahmed ben Zogga (later King Zog) overthrew the Albanian government and proclaimed a republic, 1924. Today is Christmas Eve and the Feast Day of St Adela, St Delphinus, St Gregory of Spoleto, St Irmina, St Sharbel Makhlof and Saints Tharsilla and Emilianas.

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MEANINGS OF CHRISTMAS

What happened to the cattle by the manger?

Ox and ass looked on as Jesus was born in their stable. Or so myth has it. Yet Christianity has consistently sidelined the rights of animals. In the first of our Christmas series, The Rev Professor Andrew Linzey turns to the Pseudo-Gospels and Apocrypha to explain how.

On Christmas Eve, according to Thomas Hardy, "the meek mild creatures kneel before the crib". But the canonical gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - do not depict the animals kneeling in the stable; in fact there are no references at all to animals attending Christ's birth.

Where then does this familiar story come from? The source appears to be the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, a compilation in Latin dating from the eighth or ninth centuries. This non-canonical source probably draws on an older oral tradition. The ox and the ass, for example, appear on sarcophagi of the fourth and fifth centuries and on ivory carvings of the fifth and sixth centuries.

To many the significance of this tradition, if it has one, is rather opaque. But this story does not stand alone in ancient,

non-canonical literature. In the infancy Gospel of Thomas (fifth century), Jesus revives a dead fish and moulds sparrows from clay. In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, the child Jesus makes peace with dragons in a cave, and lions and panthers accompany the Holy Family to Egypt. Most remarkably, Jesus encounters a family of lions who worship him, provoking the comment to bystanders that "the beasts are better than you, seeing that they recognise their Lord and glorify him".

In one Coptic fragment of unknown antiquity, Jesus encounters a man beating a mule, heals it, and admonishes the owner with these words: "Now go on and beat it no more, that you also may find mercy." Indeed in the Acts of Paul (end of second century), Paul is made to fight with a lion who turns out to be a peaceful convert to the new faith.

Of course these stories strain credulity, though in some cases only as much as their canonical counterparts. But they do not come from nowhere. They pick-up animal-friendly hints found, for example, in Mark 1.13 that Jesus began his ministry in the wilderness "with the wild beasts", his triumphal entry to Jerusalem on a "humble ass" (Matthew 21.1-9), and not least of all his saying about sparrows, "not forgotten by God" (Luke 12.6). In

John's gospel (1.36) Christ is explicitly claimed as the "Lamb of God".

The significance of these gospel hints and apocryphal traditions concerns Christ's identification with the animal world. Christ's birth and ministry are understood as a harbinger of peaceful creaturely relations in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that the "wolf shall live with the sheep... and a little child shall lead them" (Isa. 11.6). God's kingdom then consists in peaceable, filial, co-operative relations between species.

Theology has been the poorer for not pursuing this connection. Much of Western theology remains firmly anthropocentric. Its concentration on humanity has not unjustly led philosophers to suspect that Christianity is nothing other than the deification of humankind. Feuerbach's warning is relevant here: "Religion makes God become man and only then sets up this God that has human form... as an object of its worship and reverence."

At its worst, Christianity is idolatry in supposing that human interests are the sole or exclusive concern of God the Creator. Consequently, concern for animals and their suffering is frequently regarded as marginal, even peripheral, to Christian faith.

One way to eclipse that idolatry is by rejecting exclusivist readings of the

incarnation. However picturesque the nativity scene now appears to us, it embodies a vision of the peaceful kingdom which Christians need to recover. The incarnation is not just about God becoming human, but about the Word becoming "flesh" - a God-given solidarity with all fleshly, sentient creatures. To put it in less theological language: a non-specialist endorsement of the rights of all sentient beings.

Despite their poor record on animal welfare, there have been moments when Christians have seen and made the connection. The RSPCA was founded in 1824 by an Anglican priest, Arthur Broome, as an expression of Christ-like charity. That Christian crusade against cruelty effectively laid the foundation for the modern movement for animal rights.

Not insignificantly, it was Thomas Hardy who wrote "Compassion: An Ode" in celebration of the society's centenary. He maintained that "mercy" should be the dominant Christian ethic and that without it "helplessness breeds tyranny".

The Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon once recounted the view of Rowland Hill that a person "was not a true Christian if his dog or cat were not better off for it". And commented: "That witness is true."

South Korea hits record market

Financial crisis in South Korea deepened yesterday as the stock market took a record one-day dive.

There is a real possibility Korea could sink as South Korea's economy is in a state of collapse.

The South Korean government has announced that it will not be around to see them open.

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FINANCIAL JOURNAL OF THE YEAR

South Korean won hits record low as market dives again

The financial crisis in South Korea deepened further yesterday as the won hit a record low and the stock market took a record one-day dive. Commentators now believe there is a real possibility Korea could default, as Stephen Vines reports from Hong Kong.

Market watchers in South Korea are running out of negative adjectives to describe the slump of financial markets now under way in the world's eleventh largest economy.

Yesterday the Korean won hurtled down in value by almost 15 per cent, yet another record low, taking the currency to almost half its value in the space of weeks. Meanwhile, the stock market fell by almost 7 per cent, its steepest one-day plunge ever.

It seems that not only are market watchers left groping for words, the President elect Kim Dae-jung said yesterday that he could not "sleep since I was briefed [about the financial situation]. I am totally flabbergasted". Mr Kim, who is no stranger to hyperbole, also said the whole country could be bankrupted in a month or "even one day".

Last night, however, aides to the president-elect moved to play down his comments, made in a Korean newspaper. "The president-elect did not mean there was a real possibility of a national bankruptcy, but wanted to express his willingness to undertake restructuring," said a spokesman.

Yesterday Standard & Poor's (S&P) followed Moody's in knocking down Korean sovereign debt, corporate and bank ratings to junk bond levels.

"The lowering of Korea's foreign currency ratings out of investment-grade reflects the agency's view that recent steps taken by the government are inconsistent with the spirit of the International Monetary Fund's rescue programme," the agency said.

The warnings from the credit agencies spread fears that South Korea would start defaulting on its debts. Many bankers in Seoul believe that some \$20bn is due for repayment by the end of the month. However, the Finance Ministry said yesterday that the figure was around \$14-15bn, with another \$15bn due in January.

A fresh shock was delivered to the system with news that Korea's total foreign debt stood at around \$180bn.

The IMF, however, is adamant that its loan will suffice. A spokesman said: "The question [of whether the IMF loan to Korea will be sufficient] has been asked at various levels. The answer is yes." The IMF has already dispatched \$9bn of aid to Korea. The UK provision of \$1.25bn has not yet been drawn upon, and Treasury officials are thought to believe no further UK aid will be required.

Lee Kang-nam, assistant governor of the Bank of Korea, provided a modicum of reassurance by stating that Korea did not face the possibility of sovereign default, given its increasing supply of usable foreign reserves and an expected inflow of funds from the IMF rescue package which would take the country's foreign reserves to \$17.5bn by the end of the month.

These remarks reduced the toll on the Korean won from its lowest point in the day's trading but the currency closed at 1,960 against the US dollar. Just weeks

ago a parity of 1,000 against the US dollar was considered to be as far as the won would drop. Now it looks destined to slip below the 2,000 mark.

One reason for the accelerated rate of decline is that the government has lifted limits on daily fluctuations of trading in the won. It last stood at 10 per cent, but with strong urging from the IMF, this limit was removed.

The build-up of foreign currency repayments due at the end of the month has forced companies to scramble for dollars. Meanwhile, the sharply lowered credit ratings for Korean banks and the rocketing of interest rates mean that even if it proves possible to roll over debt repayment in the short term, these debts will be far harder to pay off in the longer term.

Such is the unease in Korea's financial markets that it brought the debt market grinding to an absolute halt yesterday.

Meanwhile, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, Korea's largest union grouping, threatened an "all-out struggle" of industrial action to prevent the layoffs which will inevitably result from the tight fiscal measures imposed by the IMF.

The unions had thought that Mr Kim would prove an ally in resisting redundancies because he has a long history of supporting labour struggles. However, he is reported to have told American officials that he saw layoffs as "inevitable" if wage cuts were not enough to prevent corporate bankruptcies.

The contagion from Korea swept across other Asian currency markets yesterday, striking with particular vengeance in Malaysia. Japanese markets were closed for a holiday yesterday.

Comment, page 12



An elderly South Korean man watching a trading board as stocks plunge in Seoul yesterday. Comments by Kim Dae-jung, the president-elect, that he was 'flabbergasted' by the seriousness of the country's crisis added to Seoul's sense of impending financial doom. Photograph: Paul Barker/Reuters

Far East investors' money devalues by one-third

Tens of thousands of investors who put money in Far East unit trusts have lost more than one-third of their value in the six months since Asia's economic crisis began.

As Andrew Verity reports, investors have withdrawn another £1bn, leaving around £5bn invested.

An investor who put £1,000 into a Far East unit trust 18 months ago would now have investments worth less than £600 on average, according to the most recent figures on fund managers' performance. That compares with £924 just six months ago.

Investing £1,000 in the worst performing fund, Fidelity's Asian fund, would lead to a value now of less than £390, a performance measuring specialist.

Of funds investing in the Far East, but not Japan, even the best performers have seen devastating losses. In the same example, £1,000 with another Fidelity fund, South-east Asia, would now be worth less than £740.

Fund Research, an arm of Standard and Poor's which tracks the performance of unit trusts, said in a statement to clients: "It has been a market for brave investors only. None of the Asian markets has provided the sterling investor with a positive return over 12

Far East funds

What £1,000 invested in Asia 18 months ago is worth

Top three funds	£
Fidelity South-east Asia	742
Stewart Ivory Asia Pacific	708
Edinburgh Pacific	684
Average	597
Bottom three funds	£
Dresdner RCM Asian Growth	475
Lazard Pacific Growth	438
Fidelity Asian	392

HSBC's index fund have been hit hardest because they have avoided speculative "red chip" stocks in Hong Kong and stuck with blue chip investments.

Pat Cunningham, a Far East expert at Edinburgh Fund Managers, said: "The crisis in the Thai baht was only the tip of the iceberg. Companies had geared up with what they thought was cheap foreign debt, thinking that growth would go on forever and a day. When their currencies devalued, the foreign debt exploded their balance sheets."

Fund managers are being forced to sell hundreds of millions of pounds in shares to meet withdrawals and double the amount they hold in cash in

order to limit exposure to further stock market falls.

Martin Harrison, managing director of Global Asset Management, said: "We now have more than 20 per cent of our fund in cash and two thirds of our money in Hong Kong. The rest is in Singapore. There's almost nothing in Thailand, Korea, Indonesia or Malaysia. By the beginning of the year we will be looking for bargains; very often there's a sharp spike upwards after such a downturn."

Fidelity said its Asian fund had performed badly because of a brief to invest in all South-east Asian countries except Hong Kong; its South-east Asia fund had poured money into the former colony.

Cinven's successes pave way for private hospital giant in UK

Cinven, the venture capitalist group, is poised to announce the creation of the biggest private hospital group in Britain with the merger of BMI and Amicus Healthcare, two of the many companies in which it has invested heavily. Andrew Yates charts the progress of Cinven and discovers the secret to its success.

Cinven specialises in throwing money behind some of British industry's best management teams. Founded in 1977 as the venture capitalist arm of the Coal Board, it was freed from the shackles of the nationalised institution two years ago when it was bought out by its own management team. Since then Cinven has expanded rapidly to become one of the biggest venture capitalist groups in the UK. Having raised a £1bn venture capital fund last year it is currently raising another £1.5bn to spend on new ventures.

Unlike some other venture capitalists which are seeking a quick buck from their investment, Cinven has a policy of investing in companies for the long term, typically three to five years.

John Brown, Cinven's deputy managing director, said yesterday: "One thing that distinguishes us from our competitors is that we are independent and not owned by a financial services group. Our strategy is to put capital expenditure into companies... which have often been starved of investment, to help them grow. Our philosophy makes us welcome to many management teams."

Cinven has capitalised on the huge growth in the management buy out and buy in markets, orchestrating £4.9bn worth of deals since 1990 including the £372m management buy out of Dunlop Slazenger from BTR and the £402m deal to spin off Gardner Merchant from Forte.

"There is pressure on large companies to divest of non-core businesses by sales or demergers and that trend will continue. Our rate of return has outperformed the stock market over the last 20 years and we aim to continue that performance," Mr Brown said.

Cinven confirmed yesterday that merger talks between BMI and Amicus Healthcare had reached the advanced stages and a deal was likely to be announced early in the new year. The new group will be the country's biggest private hospital owner, pushing Bupa into second place. It will control 41 hospitals with more than 2,500 beds.

Cinven owns a large stake in both companies and has been instrumental in creating the merger. It bought a majority stake in BMI in July as part of a £1.1bn acquisition from Générale des Eaux, the French utility. The deal was the largest European management buy out this decade. It also backed a £200m management buy out of Amicus in December 1995 when it was spun off from Compass, the caterer.

Analysts believe the merger could create a company valued at well over £1bn. The new group is likely to be floated on the stock market within a few years.

Charles Auld, who currently heads BMI, will become chairman of the new group, however most of the senior management will be made up of Amicus personnel according to industry sources. Analysts rate the Amicus management as some of the best in industry.

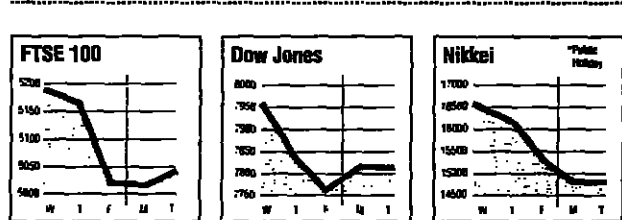
BAT investors take smaller stake in giant

BAT shareholders will have only 43 per cent of Zurich Financial Services group (ZFS) the £22bn financial services giant to be formed by merging BAT's financial services businesses Esmerald and Allied Dunbar, Threadneedle Asset Management and Farmers, the US-based insurer with Swiss-based Zurich Insurance, the 45 per cent stake when the merger was first announced in October. The adjustment reflects the improvement in Zurich's anticipated earnings since that date, a joint statement from the two companies said yesterday.

"We believe these definitive terms offer ex-

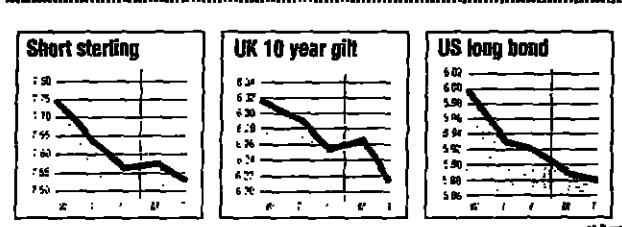
cellent value for shareholders," BAT Industries chairman, Lord Cairns said. Other details including the arrangements for joint control remain the same. The deal is subject to regulatory consent and shareholder approval and is not likely to become final until the second half of 1998, but the terms are now binding and will not be subject to further adjustment. ZFS will be one of the largest insurance and asset management groups in the world with gross premium income of \$40bn, assets under management of \$342bn and 68,000 employees. BAT shares fell 7.5p to 333.5p yesterday.

STOCK MARKETS



Indices	Close	Change	Change (%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield (%)
FTSE 100	5049.80	31.80	0.63	5367.30	4036.80	3.45
FTSE 250	2706.30	4.50	0.16	2883.20	1984.20	3.45
FTSE 350	2428.30	12.80	0.53	2570.50	2013.40	3.45
FTSE All Share	2371.09	11.59	0.49	2507.68	1989.78	3.45
FTSE SmallCap	2291.30	-1.00	-0.04	2407.40	2158.00	3.37
FTSE RealIndex	1247.90	1.70	0.14	1345.50	1213.60	3.38
FTSE AIM	979.60	1.10	0.11	1138.00	965.90	1.09
Dow Jones	7814.33	-52.3	-0.67	8298.03	6553.21	1.75
Nikkei	14788.40	-515.49	-3.37	20910.73	14648.43	1.04
Hang Seng	10368.10	105.63	1.02	16820.31	8775.88	4.09
Dax	4121.79	78.77	1.95	4459.89	2833.78	1.78

INTEREST RATES

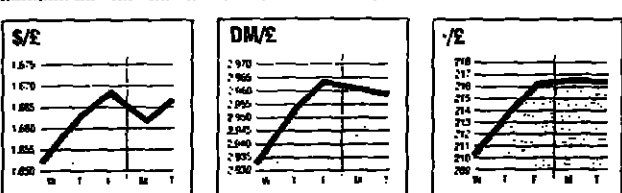


Money Market Rates	3 months	1 year	5 year	10 year	Long bond	1 yr swap
UK	7.68	7.21	7.69	6.89	6.21	1.30
US	5.91	5.31	5.97	5.16	5.71	0.63
Japan	0.74	0.23	0.71	0.14	1.92	-0.83
Germany	3.70	3.96	3.96	0.67	5.23	-0.56

MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Rises	Price (p)	Old (p)	% Chg	Falls	Price (p)	Old (p)	% Chg
St James Place	168.50	12.00	7.87	Bloomin' Buns	427.50	30.00	-8.56
Christies Int'l	285.00	20.00	7.55	Danka Bus Syst	248.50	16.50	-5.23
Orange	264.00	14.00	5.60	Wimpy	98.00	8.00	-5.77
Blue Circle	332.00	17.00	5.40	PizzaExpress	738.50	-39.50	-5.35

CURRENCIES



Pound	at 9pm	Change	at 9pm	Change	at 9pm	Change
Dollar	1.5665	+0.0020	1.6743	0.0001	0.6801	-0.15p
DM-Mark	2.9597	-0.17p	2.6050	0.0001	1.7744	-0.45p
Yen	216.44	+0.10	191.31	191.31	129.88	+0.39
S index	104.70	+0.20	94.50	S index	108.70	+0.70

OTHER INDICATORS

at 9pm	Close	Chg	at 9pm	Close	Chg	at 9pm	Close	Chg
Brent Oil (\$)	17.06	0.13	23.18	113.90	3.70	109.84	Jan	
Gold (\$)	263.05	1.80	369.30	RPI	199.60	3.70	153.91	Jan
Silver (\$)	6.03	-0.02	4.82	Base Rates	7.25	8.00		

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Knickerbox shops hit crisis at Christmas

The slowdown in consumer spending in the run-up to Christmas claimed its first corporate victim yesterday when Knickerbox, the lingerie retailer, called in the administrators. The company blamed poor trading in the last few weeks before Christmas which had caused a cash-flow crisis. Nigel Cope, City Correspondent, reports on an unseasonal high-street malaise.

Buchler Philips have been appointed administrators at Knickerbox which will continue to trade normally from its 27 branches on high streets and railway stations. Simon Freakley, at Buchler Philips said he was confident that a buyer could be found and that several expressions of interest had already been received.

"Fundamentally we have a strong brand in a well established niche that has potential in its marketplace."

Knickerbox was launched in 1986 by two former Marks & Spencer employees, Janie Godber and Stephen Schaffer. It recorded sales of £13m last year.

Gieves Group, the 200-year-old Savile Row tailor bought a 49.5 per cent stake in February last year. Gieves shares have been dented by Knickerbox's poor performance and fell a further 1.5p to 36p, a new 12-month low. They stood at 82p last year.

Knickerbox experienced a poor Christmas last year and announced a £2.7m management restructuring-structuring. Buchler Philips said the management had been doing the right things such as upgrading the stores but had been caught out by poor consumer spending. The directors applied for the administration order themselves.

The collapse of Knickerbox is the most serious evidence yet that this Christmas has not lived up to retailers' high expectations. It follows profits warnings from Oasis Stores and Mulberry and an economic survey suggesting the January sales will offer shoppers record bargains because shops have over-stocked.

Retail experts have blamed the slowdown on higher interest rates, increased taxes and the evaporation of the building society windfall money. However, John Lewis Partnership yesterday said that though trading had come very late, its targets should be met. Brendan O'Callaghan, director of trading at John Lewis' department stores said: "It looks promising but it will go right to the wire. We will need to trade strongly until close of business today. He said traditional gift items such as perfumes, books and fashion had done well. Electrical goods had not performed so strongly.

John Lewis' department stores sales had been running 4 per cent up on the previous year against a cumulative increase of 7 per cent. Mr O'Callaghan said a good final week should push the average December figure to a 6 per cent increase.

Sears takes further step out of troubled shoe retailing

Sears, the troubled retail group, has taken a further step in the withdrawal from its loss-making footwear business with the sale of 44 Shoe City branches for a net loss of £16m. The remaining 39 stores which are all large out of town warehouse style outlets, are expected to close with the loss of 650 jobs. Shoe City is thought to have recorded losses of £5m last year on sales of around £60m.

The stores are being sold for £6m to Brantano, Belgium's second largest shoe retailer which is making its first foray into the UK market. Following the recent sales of Dolcis and Shoe Express, Sears now has only the 25 profitable Cable & Co stores to sell. A deal is expected by the end of next month.

So far the break-up and sale of Sears' loss-making British Shoe Corporation has involved around 4,000 job losses. A further 650 jobs are at risk at British Shoe's headquarters

and distribution centre in Braintree, Leicestershire. The net costs of the retrenchment programme to Sears has been £115m, slightly less than the £150m expected. Around 300 shops have closed in the Shoe Express Shoe City and concessions businesses.

It is a remarkable demise for a business that until recently controlled 2,000 shoe shops in Britain and was responsible for one in five of every pair of shoes sold.

Sears will now concentrate on the de-merger of its Selfridges department store business which should take place next summer. Free-mans, the mail order business whose sale to Littlewoods was blocked by the competition authorities, is also expected to be spun-off in 2-3 years. The return of around £80m to shareholders is also expected, though no decision has been taken on the timing.

- Nigel Cope

MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

Bid hopes dial up Vodafone shares

Vodafone dialled the festive number. Helped by a round of share tips and the inevitable stories of a US strike the shares climbed to a 450.5p high with a 12.5p gain. Trading was brisk.

Merrill Lynch and HSBC provided the investment nudge. US buying rekindled the take over thoughts with the likes of American giant AT&T in the frame.

The mobile telephone group has climbed from a 240p low this year. Its performance has been due in part to its increasing subscriber base both at home and overseas which, it is generally agreed, ensures strong medium term growth.

Takeover hopes, however, have been a big inspiration. In the global telephone scene Vodafone looks one of the most enticing prizes. BT, with

its control of the Cellnet network, would stand still, if any, chance of clearing monopoly hurdles. But an overseas group could succeed and if AT&T stays at home there remains a host of potential candidates.

Vodafone also contributed to its pre-Christmas cheer by declaring it had finalised lifting its stake in Française de Radiotelephone, the French mobile network, to 20 per cent from 16.1 per cent.

Orange, however, pipped Vodafone to the top of the blue chip leader board. It gained 14p to 264p although the advance looked unrepresentative, no doubt the result of order driven trading.

The rest of the market was back in winning festive ways with Footsie scoring a 31.6 points gain to 5,049.8, despite an uncertain New York open-

ing and more distress in Korea. A \$12bn take over spree in the US helped sentiment.

Another Footsie change gave tracker funds something to think about. Only a couple of days after being relegated Blue Circle Industries was reinstated. Its swift return was due to Mercury Asset Management's departure as Merrill Lynch's bid for the fund manager went unconditional, thereby cutting its Footsie return to just two days.

One story is new chief executive David Thomas is considering retreating from the beerage. The group has always strongly defended its beer her-

Galen, the little known Ulster drugs group, replaced BCI in the FTSE 250 index. The company came to market at 150p a share in July. It was then valued at £181.9m. With its shares at 324.5p the capitalisation has increased to £393.5m.

Whitbread, the leisure group, was another to stretch to a new high. The shares closed

25p up at 911p (after 924p). They were 695p in November.

The group is rumoured to be contemplating two big disposals to give it ammunition and elbow room to continue its retail build-up.

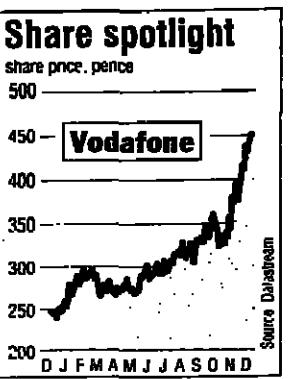
One story is new chief executive David Thomas is considering retreating from the beerage. The group has always strongly defended its beer her-

itage but there is a persistent rumour Mr Thomas, who succeeded Peter Jarvis earlier this year, feels there is little point in Whitbread remaining the fourth force in a declining market.

The other possible disposal said to be occupying Mr Thomas is the Thresher's office chain which has been hit by supermarket and bookleggers. Paris, the venture capitalist backed arrival on the drink shops scene, is thought to be interested.

Financial shares, on renewed hopes of corporate action, were given another whiff. Lloyds TSB was the latest variation of a well worn theme. Helped by the sale of a loan business Lloyds gained 25p to 761p. Abbey put on 41p to 1,069 (after 1,080p).

Sun Life & Provincial improved 22p to 440p as the



French giant AXA-UAP cut its stake, as promised, to 71.6 per cent selling 6 million shares.

Rolls-Royce firmed to 228p. Henderson Crosthwaite rate the shares a buy, suggesting profits of £285m this year will grow to £530m by 2,001. Rascal Electronic held at 258p with Salomon Smith Barney joining the buy chorus.

Ionica, the under pressure telephone group, recovered a further 9p to 96.5p, encouraged by director buying at 84p. Aegis, the media buyer, was firm at 67p with Seag turnover approaching 10 million.

Acas & Hutchison, the edible oil group, slumped 26p to 259p after a 25 per cent profit fall. Reflex, a reflective inks group, was the day's worst performer, losing nearly 70p to 9.5p following another profit warning. The shares once touched 126.5p.

Optoplast, supplying optical and sunglass cases and a range of jewellery boxes, made a successful debut. Placed at 126p by stockbroker Williams de Broe the shares went to 142p. The company is thought to have 50 per cent of the optical case market, selling to the five big optician chains.

Langsons Foods, the struggling tea and coffee group, held at 1.75p as non executive director Stephen Barclay sold his 4.2m shares at 1.75p. Last week Plantation & General sold 24m shares (11 per cent). It still has 11.5 per cent.

Bickerton, a builder and property developer, held at 40p - its March flotation price. Stockbroker Teather & Greenwood sees this year's profits rising from £232,000 to £300,000 and then hitting £1.3m.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is the latest twelve months dividend gross as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding extraordinary items but including exceptional items. Other financial ratios are as indicated. A-B-A 1 Standard P/P Ratio plus a 4-digit code. All prices are Bloomberg Generic.

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Seag volume: £2.7m trades 37.8%

Market Leaders: Top 20 volumes

FTSE 100 Index hour by hour

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TAKING STOCK

Optoplast, supplying optical and sunglass cases and a range of jewellery boxes, made a successful debut. Placed at 126p by stockbroker Williams de Broe the shares went to 142p. The company is thought to have 50 per cent of the optical case market, selling to the five big optician chains.

Langsons Foods, the struggling tea and coffee group, held at 1.75p as non executive director Stephen Barclay sold his 4.2m shares at 1.75p. Last week Plantation & General sold 24m shares (11 per cent). It still has 11.5 per cent.

Bickerton, a builder and property developer, held at 40p - its March flotation price. Stockbroker Teather & Greenwood sees this year's profits rising from £232,000 to £300,000 and then hitting £1.3m.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is the latest twelve months dividend gross as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding extraordinary items but including exceptional items. Other financial ratios are as indicated. A-B-A 1 Standard P/P Ratio plus a 4-digit code. All prices are Bloomberg Generic.

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You will hear the current FTSE 100 index followed by a Stock Market Summary Report. You can interrupt at any time to hear a Real-Time Share Price by saying "plus a 4-digit code" on the listings on this page.

To get a Membership Number to set-up your Portfolio facility, please call the Help Desk on 071-729-5288 (during business hours).

For help with the service, including the Portfolio facility, call the Help Desk on 071-729-5288 (7/5 p.m. London EC2A 4EP).

Seag volume: £2.7m trades 37.8%

Market Leaders: Top 20 volumes

FTSE 100 Index hour by hour

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OUTLOOK

IN THE CHALLENGE

Strong performance on balance

Most concrete signs of recovery began to take its shape yesterday.

News that the UK's deficit widened in October and November, reports, are also signs that the Far East crisis has begun to ease.

UK firms.

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Europe overbanked? Pull the other one



OUTLOOK ON THE CHALLENGE FACING BRITAIN'S LEADING BANKS

Martin Taylor, chief executive of Barclays, has asserted in a number of recent interviews that Europe is "overbanked". This is not a concept most ordinary banking customers find easy to grasp, for despite the burgeoning number of high street banks and Mr Taylor's belief that we need less of them, banking profits are booming and most British banks are throwing off excess capital like there's no tomorrow. In these circumstances, the need would seem rather to be for more competition, not less. So what does Mr Taylor mean by overbanked?

Plainly there's a sub text here, for Mr Taylor believes that regulators can eventually be persuaded that Barclays be allowed to merge with another sizeable British bank like NatWest. Though he acknowledges that such a merger would raise serious competition concerns in particular market segments and regions, he argues that these could be overcome through disposals. In any case, any merger of this sort should be viewed not in terms of narrow domestic market concerns, Mr Taylor believes, but in the wider European context and in particular in the light of imminent European Monetary Union.

With monetary union comes the reality of a single European market in banking and other forms of financial service. Most companies will progressively require just one bank to deal with their European needs, not as at present a bank in each country. The same argument can be applied to retail banking. When in matters financial, Britain, Germany, France, Spain

and the rest are as one, do we really need so many banks? The dynamic of the market place, bankers like Mr Taylor argue, will force a series of mergers and takeovers among the present plethora of national banks to create a limited number of pan European super banks. Already we are seeing an attempt at this with the mooted merger of Union Bank of Switzerland and Swiss Bank Corporation.

These pressures are not confined to banking. Most chief executives of large international companies make exactly the same sort of arguments about their own industries. But because banking is all about money, the effects of European monetary union do take on a special significance when applied to this sector.

It is therefore vitally important that regulators get these decisions right when banks and other financial services organisations come hammering at their door for permission to merge. Do Mr Taylor and others like him have a point, or is this just a case of dressing up an old and fundamentally disreputable ambition in new clothing? Is not this in the end all about the businessman's natural desire to acquire the competition so as better to crunch and exploit the customer? If it is, how handy that monetary union should provide such a splendid new justification for this time honoured endeavour.

A new book on the banking industry, *The Banking Revolution - Salvation or Slaughter*, provides a useful insight into the commercial pressures on this industry, though it doesn't pretend to offer policy makers answers on how to deal with

the creation of European super banks. Written by a group of consultants from the Mitchell Madison Group, the book is about the impact of information technology on the industry and it paints what in some respects is an apocalyptic view of the future for the present market leaders.

No bank can afford not to invest in information technology, the authors point out, because it would then get left behind. The problem is that as they do so, their profits begin to drift away since their cost structures are not changing fast enough to allow them to generate sufficient returns.

The effect of IT therefore is simultaneously to increase value for users of bank services while destroying the profits of the providers. Technology has made possible the provision of enhanced services at lower cost; it has enormously increased capacity while diminishing the need for labour, thereby working in favour of consumers rather than shareholders and workers.

One of the results of this is greatly to increase the pressure for consolidation and for expansion into other areas of financial services as organisations attempt to defend present rates of return and market positions. The question for regulators is not just whether it is appropriate to allow banks the luxury of this response, but also whether present lines of regulation are sufficient to the task of customer protection.

IT has allowed the blurring of channels of distribution and product in a way that creates pressure for cross financial in-

dustry consolidation. It is partly in response to this process that Britain is setting up a super regulator, the Financial Services Authority, which brings together previously separate and industry specific forms of investor protection and supervision. Government regulation is thus already beginning to mimic the pressures of the market place.

So is Mr Taylor right about this after all? Or to put the question more correctly, should policy makers be allowing the old established organisations of banking a special dispensation because of the way IT and the single market are transforming their industry? What the Mitchell Madison book shows is that because the cost of large scale information processing has been declining by orders of magnitude for many years now, established banks cannot help but invest in it. By doing so they are creating over-capacity and reducing the barriers to entry as technology becomes more widely accessible and reduces the scale required for low cost operation.

This in turn has encouraged a range of new entrants - supermarkets, other financial institutions like Standard Life and the Prudential, and entrepreneurs such as Richard Branson. Furthermore it has allowed smaller banks such as Royal Bank of Scotland not saddled with the cost of an extensive branch network an unprecedented opportunity to raid the customer base of larger players with new, low cost products. The book warns "the potential exists that radical innovation could undermine traditional banking and that defenders are unprepared and vulnerable".

In these circumstances, is it not only right and fair that established banks be allowed to merge?

The arguments might seem finely balanced, but in the end the answer has to be no, at least for the time being. Yes Europe is "overbanked", but not in the sense that Mr Taylor means it. The overbanking is in the form of tired old established players whose response to the process of change is to reach for the nearest investment banker and begin planning to take each other over. Mr Branson doesn't believe Britain or Europe to be overbanked, and nor does Standard Life and the many others now entering the market for the first time.

There is really only one good argument for allowing big established banks in Britain to go this route. The possibility, already apparent in the Swiss banking merger, that regulators in other countries allow their national banks to consolidate would undoubtedly put players like Barclays not allowed to do the same at a serious competitive disadvantage in the single currency. However, this could easily be dealt with by applying a consistent European wide approach to mergers policy.

If established banks are allowed to consolidate their position there is a real risk that they will use their power to stifle new entrants and the process of change will at least be slowed. The customer, who for a change is beginning to get the upper hand as things stand, would lose as a result. The market should be allowed to work its ways and established players must either adapt or die.

Strong pound takes its toll on balance of payments

The first concrete signs that the strong pound has begun to take its toll emerged yesterday, with news that the UK's trade deficit widened sharply in October and November. As *Lea Paterson* reports, there are also indications that the Far Eastern crisis has begun to hurt UK firms.

The pundits who predicted UK firms could withstand the

pressures of the strong pound appeared to have been proved wrong yesterday. The UK's global trade deficit on goods and services rose to £0.6bn in October. This was up £0.2bn from September, and was the highest monthly deficit recorded since July 1996.

"The figures provide a further blow to the theory that UK firms can cope quite comfortably with the strong pound," Jonathan Loynes, at HSBC Greenwell, said.

Preliminary indications are that the November deficit will be even worse. The Office for National Statistics estimates

that the deficit in goods traded with non-European Union countries will be £1.1bn, up £0.2bn from October, and the highest since October 1995. "The trend in the UK trade balance is widening," the ONS said.

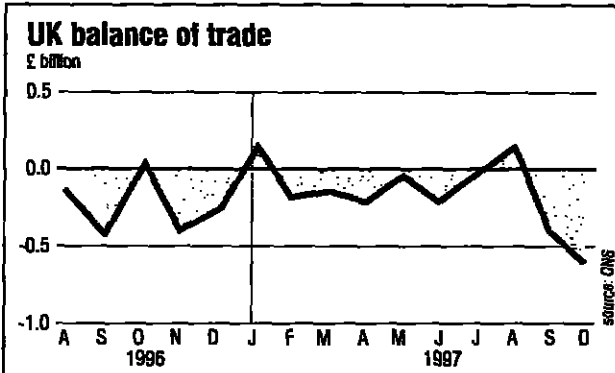
The market deterioration in the non-EU trade balance in November was attributed by many economists to continuing difficulties in the Far East. "Today's data suggest an Asian effect is coming through," said economists at ABN Amro.

"Exports to Asia are weakening significantly as demand collapses," agreed Adam Cole of HSBC James Capel.

The trade deficit on goods alone widened to £1.4bn in October, reflecting a combination both of sterling's strength and a levelling off in world-wide demand.

Geoff Dicks, of NatWest Markets, said the figures provided "the first definitive sign that exports are cracking beneath the strength of sterling and/or early evidence of a slowdown in world demand".

A deterioration in the UK trade balance has been predicted by economists for some time. Indeed, many were surprised that no concrete signs of a deterioration had come



through sooner, especially given the warnings sounded by recent surveys of manufacturers.

"The full force of the laws of gravity, long in abeyance, is now being felt," Mr Dicks said.

But the UK's trade balance is, by historical standards, still remarkably healthy. Economists are predicting that, even with further deterioration in December, the UK's balance of

trade will remain in surplus for the year as whole.

And although a balance of trade deficit is forecast for 1998, this is not anticipated to be as large as the shortfalls that typically accompany UK boom times. Some economists are sceptical that the figures will persuade the Bank of England to ease off on interest rate policy.

Jacques Vert pulls back from brink of bankruptcy

Jacques Vert, the troubled fashion group, pulled itself back from the brink of bankruptcy yesterday after announcing new financing and a wide-ranging shake up of its business. Bob Reid, the chairman, admitted the shake-up would lead to "substantial redundancies" among 900 staff.

Losses ballooned from £5m to £9.5m for the year to May. Littlewoods, which owns a 29.9-per-cent stake, is providing a £500,000 loan and Midland Bank has increased its overdraft facility to £8m. Jacques Vert is selling Grace Collection to a management buy-in team for £1.6m. But the group has been forced to close the rest of the wholesale division. Problems stem from a decision to create trendier clothing ranges designed to appeal to a younger customer. The experiment flopped and the group has introduced new ranges to cater for the more mature, affluent woman.

Reckitt on US buying spree

Reckitt & Colman, the household products group, has acquired four US household brands for £96m. They are Spray 'n Wash, Glaxi Plus, Vivid and Yes, bought from SC Johnson & Son, a US group. SC Johnson in turn is acquiring the brands as part of its purchase of the Dow Chemical consumer products business. Sales of the brands are estimated at £78m and are expected to record profits of £10m. Following the deal, North America will account for 36 per cent of Reckitt's sales.

Gaming machine buy-out

European Leisure has sold its Maytag gaming-machines business to a management buy-out team led by Roy Howell, whose father founded the business in 1968, for £16.5m. The venture capitalists, are backing the management team. Maytag is the UK's second-largest gaming-machine manufacturer, with annual sales of £29m, and produced a pre-tax profit of £3m for the year to June 1997. European Leisure will concentrate on building up its bars and discotheques business.

KPMG's accent on Europe

KPMG and Ernst & Young stressed the strong European focus of their planned merger in their formal submission presented to the European competition authorities yesterday. Presentation of the document comes as Brussels sources indicated the planned deal and that between Coopers & Lybrand and Price Waterhouse would - as expected - be subjected to an investigation lasting several months.

Lloyd's broker suspended

Lloyd's has suspended Anthony Frost, former chairman of Nelson Hurst Marine Ltd, for six months, and fined him £10,000 plus Lloyd's costs of £40,000 and censured him, following findings of misconduct. The allegations against him related to the taking of a secret profit by NHML.

Tonic for Pernod-Ricard

Shares in Pernod-Ricard rose 5 per cent in Paris after it sold its Orangina drink brand to Coca-Cola for \$840m to concentrate on higher-margin spirit brands. It may now buy Dewar's whisky and Bombay Gin, brands that Guinness and Grand Met must dispose of under the terms of their merger.

Profits fall in edible oils

Edible oils processor Acatos & Hutcheson saw profits fall per cent to £5.84m in the year to 28 September on sales which slipped 2 per cent to £277m.

Farm equipment buy-in

Specialist metals group Wilshaw has sold its farm-equipment spares distribution business to a management buy-in team for £22.5m to concentrate on its powder metals division. The businesses disposed of made £3.5m last year.

ICI sells explosives arm to Orica for £223m

ICI's radical re-structuring made further progress yesterday when it sold its explosives businesses in Europe and the Americas to the former ICI Australia, now known as Orica, for £223m. Orica, which was itself 62 per cent owned by ICI until earlier this year, said the move followed a competitive auction for the business.

The businesses form part of the original grouping of ICI's operations when the group was formed in 1926.

The move is part of a string of deals by ICI under which it is moving away from

lower margin bulk chemicals to specialise in more profitable sectors such as coatings materials and specialty chemicals.

ICI paid £5bn for Unilever's specialty chemicals business earlier this year and the proceeds from recent disposals are being used to replace debt.

Yesterday's deal includes the explosive operations in Canada, Latin America and Europe and its distribution business in the United States.

The division made a trading profit of \$3m last year on sales of \$46m. ICI will book

an £85m profit on the deal. It is expected to be earnings enhancing.

Rob Margetts, ICI's director responsible for industrial chemicals and materials, said the deal re-united ICI's American and European explosives businesses with those of Orica, "recreating once again the global leader in the industry". It will have a global market share of 20 per cent.

The business manufactures and supplies a range of bulk and packaged explosive and blast management services to the mining, quarrying,

construction and allied exploration industries worldwide. The business employs 27,000 people.

ICI's explosive business has manufacturing sites in Canada, Mexico, Brazil and the UK.

There has been a flurry of disposals by ICI in recent weeks. Earlier this month it sold its explosive interests in Africa to Orica for £117m. It sold its UK fertiliser operations to a US company for £200m last month. A raft of industrial chemical operations are due to be sold to Du Pont.

PEOPLE & BUSINESS



Asargh. The time for making New Year's Resolutions is upon us once again. Will those kitchen cupboards finally be replaced?

According to IFA Promotion, the lobby group for independent financial advice, over 15 million people say they will start 1998 with a resolution. Just one in four will keep to it.

The lobby group also estimates that nearly 7 million will make a financial resolution.

IFA Promotion surveyed over 1,000 people and extrapolated the results. Amongst their conclusions is that, of those making a financial resolution, nearly half (2.76m, 41 per cent) will aim to save for a specific item like a car or a holiday, in the year ahead.

More than a quarter (27 per cent) said they wanted to spend

less money, and a fifth wanted to clear outstanding debts. Other popular resolutions include changing jobs to get more money (13 per cent), investing more money (13 per cent) and paying off the credit card (12 per cent).

The survey also says that Will Carling, former captain of England's rugby side, "wants to become fluent in French and Italian". He also wants "to spend less money on weird gadgets". Nothing, though, about winning back his place in the Harlequins side, from which he was recently dropped.

Anita Roddick's Body Shop empire is to lose Eric Heyer, a board director and one of the company's key managers over the last 16 years. Eric, 62, will retire on New Year's Eve. He created Body Shop's first warehouse in 1982 at Naim House in Rustington, West Sussex. Four years later he established another warehouse and a head office for the company at Wick, West Sussex, which was opened by Diana, Princess of Wales.

In 1988 Eric joined the board and supervised a further move by the company to Littlehampton a year later.

has been the cornerstone of our manufacturing, purchasing and operational business."

Mr Roddick went on: "As a director of Soapworks in Glasgow, Eric has played a central role in the renovation of the Easterhouse site and the acquisition of plant and machinery for an initiative that has helped breathe new life into one of the most economically marginalised communities in Britain."

While Eric prepares to take it easy, Keith Clark has been elected to a second gruelling three-year term as senior partner of Britain's biggest law firm, Clifford Chance.

Keith, 53, is best known as a global "Mr Fixit", helping countries to reschedule their sovereign debt. He has provided legal advice on debt restructurings for

Poland, South Africa, Sudan, and most recently Russia. The Russian rejig involved debts of \$33bn.

Although Keith is a keen traveller, a spokesman insists he will not be flying off to the Far East to help Japan and South Korea sort out their financial woes. The spokesman admitted, however, that "Obviously debt rescheduling [for those countries] is an option. Sounds like Keith should keep his toothbrush handy, just in case."

Grovelling apologies to Tim Miller and Richard Timberlake, who recently sold 30 per cent of their unit trust business, Portfolio, to Liberty, not Fidelity as I wrote yesterday.

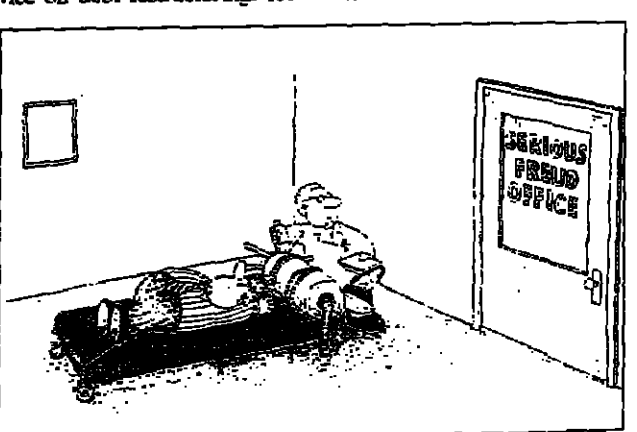
Merrill Lynch has poached Richard Brank from Credit

Agricole Indosuez Group to join the former's European equity strategy team. The investment bank, says Mr Brank, will "focus on the European Monetary Union and the impact the single currency is expected to have on European equity markets". Racy stuff.

Prior to Credit Agricole Mr Brank, 37, headed up the European equity team at Barings Asset Management, from 1991 to 1995. His very first job was at the Bank of England as an analyst, followed by a stint at NM Rothschild.

His interests are hill-walking and writing. His first book, slated for publication in mid-summer, is called: *Progress and the Invisible Hand: Philosophy and Economics of Human Advance*. Sounds like a page-turner.

I thought this Christmas card from the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) was worth sharing. It's not often that the inhabitants of Elm Street exhibit a sense of humour. On the other hand, this card could have been meant entirely seriously, as an example of the way the SFO uses its controversial "Section Two" powers to require witnesses to provide information. That's nothing to the Inland Revenue's thumbscrews, of course...



COMPANY RESULTS

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Acatos & Hutcheson (F)	2,77m (282m)	5,82m (7,68m)	9.5p (14.5p)	10.5p (10.0p)
Angloamer Mining (I)	-	-0.85m (-4.42m)	-0.1p (-0.1p)	nil
Paywood (I)	20.3m (2.2m)	0.485m (0.103m)	2.14p (1.42p)	0.50p (0.40p)
Jacqueline Vert (F)	44.94m (42.67m)	-9.45m (-6.04m)	-61.7p (-41.2p)	-
Stewart & Wright (I)	-	0.223m (0.219m)	10.28p (9.40p)	nil

(F) - Final (I) - Interim EPS is pre-exceptionals *Dividend to be paid as a FID

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19/SPORTS QUOTES OF '97

'My mind is very, very open and so is my mouth – as you've probably gathered. Hopefully I can synchronise them' – Tony Banks, on being named Minister of Sport

Sayings of the Quotemeister

It flashed through my mind that Rory might be taking the piss. It was just as well I didn't say something like, 'Fuck off, Rory.' Because that wouldn't have gone down too well. *Tony Banks, friend of impressionist Rory Bremner, on receiving the call offering him the job of Minister of Sport.*

I know one thing. If I'd been Tony Blair, I wouldn't have appointed me. *Banks.*

Tony Blair said to me, "Get in there and live it up", and I'm going to do precisely that. *Banks on his suggestions to form a United Kingdom football team and for players to turn out for the country they play in.*

Picking the England side is a matter for Glenn Hoddle. Tony Banks is certainly living things up. *Downing Street statement on the same issue.*

On certain subjects it's better to think before you speak. *Cesare Maldini, Italian national coach, on Banks' ideas.*

National flags should not be carried into the stadium, because then sport becomes almost an extension of war. I don't think you should have the playing of national anthems before football matches. Why stir people up? *Banks.*

When God gave Paul Gascoigne his football talent he took his brain out at the same time. *Banks.*

So much of women's tennis is treated like soft porn. We have heard nothing about Tim Henman or Greg Rusedzki's choice of underwear or their body shapes. *Banks during Wimbledon.*

The idea of throwing my arms around the Queen when Chelsea score, or screaming "the referee's a wanker", which I'm likely to do, probably would not go down too well in the Royal Box. I'm not going to have my enjoyment of one of the great days of my club spoiled by being next to Royalty of no fixed abode. *Banks, on being offered a seat in the Royal Box for the FA Cup final.*

If I had to choose between being the Sports Minister or a Chelsea supporter, I wouldn't be the Sports Minister. *Banks, in the run-up to the final.*

The idea that the only sports worth encouraging are competitive sports is bollocks. Its ideological bollocks. And I hope that you ain't going to see much ideological bollocks around here. *Banks.*

I'll have a hell of a job not leaping up if he scores. *Banks, on Italian striker Gianfranco Zola before the crucial World Cup decider in Rome.*

A cosy stitch-up. *Tony Blair on UEFA's backing of Germany's 2006 World Cup bid.*

If people don't like the way I do things, stuff 'em. *Banks.*

The gospel according to the gaffer

I am ugly, but I have other qualities. You, I think you have problems with your wife but you seem a nice person. *Georges Leekens, Belgium coach, asked about the spirit in his squad before the World Cup play-off against Ireland.*

There was nothing between the sides. Apart from the seven goals. *Danny Wilson, Barnsley manager, after his side's defeat to Manchester United.*

I want this to become my ticket to dreams. I came by underground because I wanted to know the way the fans feel coming to Spurs. *Christian Gross, new Tottenham manager, holding up a Tube ticket at the club's press conference.*

They have the potential to be a sleeping giant. *Chris Weddle, on his new side, Burnley.*

We are developing our youth policy. *Kenny Dalglish, Newcastle United manager, after acquiring the aging Ian Rush, John Barnes and Stuart Pearce in the close season.*

I don't want to be anyone's assistant but I'd go to Manchester United as the kit manager. *Sammy McIlroy, Macclesfield manager and former United player, on his career ambitions.*

I don't know how old I was at the start of the game, but I'm 93 now. It was like 120 years in Alcatraz. *Martin O'Neill, of Leicester City, after his team's Coca-Cola Cup semi-final victory over Wimbledon on away goals.*

I will spend next week coaching my players on how to get their hands out of the way of a ball belted at them from six yards and travelling at 120mph. *Gary Megson, of Stockport, upset at the penalty awarded against his side in a 1-0 defeat at Reading.*

Perhaps he did go in with two feet, but I thought referees in England allowed that. *Ronald Gullit, of Chelsea, after a challenge by Dennis Wise on Arsenal's Patrick Vieira.*

I'm going to be as natural as I can – a right miserable bastard. *Roy Hudd, taking over at West Bromwich Albion.*

Magnifico, as they say in Paris. *Peter Reid, of Sunderland, on a display by Lionel Ferret.*

I think he will eventually play for England. *Reid predicts a call-up for Lee Clark. A couple of hours later, the player was drafted into the Tournoi de France squad.*

Trials and tribulations, troubles and treachery

You must be daft. No one person can throw a game. *Bruce Grobbelaar, on trial for match-fixing with Hans Sagers, John Toshack and others.*

Christopher Vincent is the repository of treachery. He is a serpent – no creator of literature could have invented him. He slides forward to his riches, hoping you will do right by him. He might as well have taken the oath on a cheque-book. *Rodney Klean, Grobbelaar's barrister, on the chief prosecution witness.*

Maybe we'll have to decide this on penalties. But we'll win because we've got two goalkeepers. *Grobbelaar, after the jury in the first trial was discharged.*

Nobody has the right to win at all costs... What happened was a dirty trick, an unworthy blow which in everyday life would have criminal consequences. *'Corriere dello Sport' editorial following the shunt in the European Grand Prix that put Michael Schumacher out and gave Jacques Villeneuve the world title.*

I knew Michael was capable of just taking me off, and that's what he tried to do. *Villeneuve.*

Certainly, I closed the door. It was clearly about winning it, all or nothing, and there was nothing more to lose. Without me, Jacques would have more or less driven into the gravel pit. That's why I don't quite understand the situation now. *Schumacher.*

He is a very good player but a shit man. *Frank Lebeuf, of Chelsea, on Arsenal's Dennis Bergkamp, whom he accused of trying to elbow him.*

We would prefer not to play Pontypridd at all. They are semi-civilised animals. *Laurent Seigne, Brive coach, following the bar-room brawl between the two sides, before their second game.*

room brawl between the two sides, before their second game. Tiger Woods has shown the world he is a spoiled brat. If he doesn't get what he wants instantly on the course he flies into an infantile rage. It's pathetic and the players don't like it. *Mac O'Grady, golf entrepreneur.*

He didn't pull up. He's a coward. *Donovan Bailey on Michael Johnson, after winning the \$1m (£600,000) head-to-head challenge in Toronto.*



'If people don't like the way I do things, stuff 'em' – Tony Banks, Sports Minister

Photograph: Reuters

Ears and tears in boxing spheres

I snapped in that ring and did something that I have never done before and will never do again. I apologise to the world. *Mike Tyson, two days after being disqualified for biting off a piece of Evander Holyfield's ear.*

I have something he probably wants. *Mitch Libonati, cleaner, on taking the chunk of ear to the champion's dressing-room.*

Holyfield is not the warrior he claims he is. He got a nick on his ear and he quit. *Tyson.*

Boxers should eat before they fight. *Sylvester Stallone, at ringside.*

When he walked away I thought it was a joke. I thought he was trying to fool me so he could sucker-punch me. *Lennax Lewis, after beating Oliver McCall, who ended the fight in tears.*

I am never going to get beat. I am going to retire a legend. *Naseem Hamed, before beating Billy Hardy.*

I wasn't there when he killed the guy, but shit, if the guy got killed he was probably doing something he shouldn't have been doing. *Tyson on his manager Don King, who served four years for beating a man to death.*

People like Don King shouldn't be allowed to be in boxing. He's a disgrace to the human race. *Frank Maloney, Lennax Lewis's manager.*

I'm going to get on the aeroplane tomorrow and bare my big, black ass out the window and show what I think of Denmark. *Larry Holmes, the former heavyweight champion, after losing on a split decision to Denmark's Brian Nielsen.*

Women are made for loving and not hitting. Women's boxing could attract some kinky people. I am all against it. *Henry Cooper.*

Sex and violence and wild, wild athletes

He's the only player I've ever known who could drink 16 pints and still play football the next day. *Paul Gascoigne, on why his hero is Bryan Robson.*

Smoke billowed out of the toilets when the door was opened. *Caitlin Cherry, waitress at the restaurant in New Zealand which Phil Tufnell was asked to leave after allegedly smoking a joint.*

I won't let them do it at the hotel where we're staying but I won't object if they rent a house or find a place to do it. *Daniel Passarella, Argentina coach, consents to his players having sex during the World Cup finals.*

I have worked hard on my own by doing lots of swimming, cycling and making love as often as possible. *Gianluca Vialli, of Chelsea, on his fitness regime.*

I tackle to hurt people – Samoan players are like that. When they go for a hit, the aim is to put the player out so he never comes back. *Terry Fanolua, Gloucester's Western Samoan signing.*

There were lots of pictures of Martina [Hingis]'s knickers and Anna [Kournikova]'s short skirt. This year I think they went too far. These are 15- and 16-year-olds. These are babies. *Monica Seles, on this year's Wimbledon.*

She may be a Light Blue, but she'll be a dark blue when she's finished. *Cambridge rugby fan on the Varsity match streaker.*

She's got nipples like organ stops. *Roger Black, British athletics team captain, on heptathlete Denise Lewis's photo spread in 'Total Sport'.*

I am a British spy. You can't do this. *Alex Higgins, on being arrested in a Manchester hotel.*

'Today, Italy is inferior to England' – Gazzetta dello Sport

We played the Italians at their own game. They are very good at diving, cheating, trying to waste time. *Paul Gascoigne on England's success in the World Cup qualifier in Rome.*

He looked like a pint of Guinness running around. *Gascoigne on the bandaged head of captain Paul Ince.*

I look like a black Terry Butcher at the moment. I didn't want the bandage on because I thought I'd look silly. But I don't care now. *Ince.*

They've become a great side. *Cesare Maldini, Italy's coach, on England.*

Today, Italy is inferior to England. It doesn't have its sense of security, its control of play and not even – listen to this – its adaptability. The lions who once knew only how to launch the ball and run under it, tackle, cross and mix it up, now dribble with skill, take control of the action, take possession with elegance and look for the winning chance. *'Gazzetta dello Sport'.*

We are talking about a new epoch. *'La Repubblica', Italian newspaper, on Roberto Baggio's decision to shave off his ponytail.*

I have always planned to retire when I was at the top and at Manchester United I have reached the pinnacle of my career. *Eric Cantona, on retiring from football.*

The page has turned. Eric has gone to become a film actor. I preferred it when he was a footballer. I was proud of him. Maybe I will be proud of him in his new career, but not yet. *Eleanore Cantona, Eric's mum.*

I am the steering wheel. My foot is on the accelerator and the brake. The deal simply means we will have a bigger engine. *Sam Hammam, managing director of Wimbledon, on selling part of his stake in the club.*

Ronaldini is an infantile disease of footballing neoliberalism. *'Famiglia Cristiana', Italy's best-selling magazine, on the lucrative move of Ronaldo to Internazionale.*

The thrill of the European Cup was the immediate elimination, with one's chest bared. He who is hit dies. *Alfredo Stefano on the Champions' League format.*

There has been too much sloppiness and disregard for money. The golden rule, me, won't go on forever. *Jack Hayward, Wolverhampton Wanderers owner.*

I told them all – the butlers, the chambermaids, everybody – to have the day off and go and watch the game. I even had to make my own lunch. *The Duke of Devonshire, president of Chesterfield, on the FA Cup semi-final against Middlesbrough.*

I'm not mad. I cannot do it. If I train every day, I will die. *Diego Maradona, on Boca Juniors' offer to take him back if he undertakes to train every day.*

This is a highly sought-after location. We don't want someone rolling up and making it look like some kind of gypsy encampment. *Neighbour of Frodo Baggins, after the Chelsea goalkeeper was refused permission by his residents' association to put up a satellite dish.*

Everton is a house on fire, the walls are down and, if the blaze isn't put out soon, it will engulf the entire club. *Alan Ball, former Everton player, on the Goodison Park crisis.*

The FA is like Madame Tussaud's. We tell our people to keep them moving so we can tell them apart from the dummies. *Alan Sugar, Spurs chairman, at the Oxford Union.*

I could get Spurs into the top six and into Europe. *Uri Geller.*

If he was in Star Trek, he'd be the best player of whichever solar system they were in. *Ian Wright on his Arsenal team-mate, Dennis Bergkamp.*

The team are worshipped in my town. We love them and we think the team is well organised and has got high skills in football. *Zakaria Yusuf Mwam-zandi, of Kenyan village side Msambweni FC, who changed their name to Darlington (The Quakers) FC after seeing them lose to Leeds in the Coca-Cola Cup last year.*

The eyes were cut out and hanging down. It was really disgusting. *Ian Botting, chairman of Eastbourne FC, who found a pig's head in the dug-out before a match.*

Armenian Footballer. Very hairy. Credit cards accepted. With Moustache. Advertisement in magazine section of the 'Fulham Chronicle's' classified pages. Rugby union is a beast's game played by gentlemen, soccer is a gentleman's game played by beasts. American football is a beast's game played by beasts and rugby league is a beast's game played by demons. *Robbie Paul, Bradford Bulls captain.*

This jersey is going to win the World Cup. Just make sure that when the final comes you are wearing it and not stuck at home watching some other bastard wear it. *Clive Woodward to his England rugby union squad.*

Before Christmas we had a bad taste in our mouth, but we shrugged off the cobwebs. Our jaded players from early in the week transformed from an ob-

solete spring into a coiled spring and threw off the psychological bondage. They responded spontaneously and made large dents in the scoreboard. *Jack Rowell, then England RU coach, after the Five Nations' victory over Scotland.*

We will get better. *Christian Cullen, All Blacks full-back, after the 81-3 win over Llanelli.*

He could come out with an axe and he wouldn't get sent off. *Great Britain RL manager Phil Lowe after Australian hard-man Gordon Tullis escaped dismissal for three high tackles in the second Test.*

My wife hits harder than him. *Terry O'Connor, Wigan forward, on his brawl with Tullis in the World Club Championship.*

I was watching some rugby for the first time. It made me think that tennis players are maybe a bunch of sissies. We'd better beef things up. *John McEnroe after Twickenham rugby union Test.*

If God had meant for sun to shine on Wimbledon, he would have put it in Florida. *The 'Miami Herald'.*

Don't stand there like the Statue of Liberty, give me some balls. *Jeff Tavaras, Wimbledon controversialist, to ball-girl during his defeat to Rodolphe Gilbert.*

I have freed myself from the chains of the public. *Boris Becker, who played his last Grand Slam at Wimbledon.*

Rum and coke, bananas, sugar and laid-back, lazy black men. *Speaker at the 'Caribbean Experience' briefing for the England cricket team, on what to expect in the West Indies.*

I expect our cricketers to die for England. When they wear those

three lions on their chests it should be the greatest honour of their lives. If there is a laissez-faire attitude then we have a problem. *Lord MacLaurin, England Cricket Board chairman.*

Steve Waugh was saying just how much the Australians respect Atherton. He said, "they say he's like a cockroach you can't kill. You stamp on him but he keeps coming back." *Adam Hoolioke on the England captain, Michael Atherton.*

It serves them right for sending us Rolf Harris. *Bernard Manning, on Australia's first-Test defeat.*

If anyone slugs us off after that, they need beheading. *Darren Gough, on England's memorable first day of the Ashes series.*

In terms of the impact he can make on the game, he's the most important golfer who has ever played. *Tom Watson on Tiger Woods, at the US Masters.*

The only way I can create such arm speed is when I drive with my elbow hanging out of the car window. *Nick Faldo on Woods' driving.*

You'll see turn this place into a pitch and putt. *Spectator to Woods after the world No 1 found the rough in practice for the Open.*

I'm a Cablinasian. *Woods, who is a quarter black, a quarter Thai, a quarter Chinese, one-eighth white and one-eighth American Indian.*

Everyone wants more money and it's better in my bank account than theirs. *Eddie Irvine, after Ferrari extended his contract.*

I didn't see what had happened to him. Our mirrors don't see that far back. *Michael Schumacher on Damon Hill's parade-lap exit from the Melbourne Grand Prix.*

It would be ludicrous to suggest that my brothers and I were down to our last three camels, but we can no longer go on as we have

before... At present the process of owning horses is like driving with a flat tyre. All we seek is the luxury of a slow puncture. *Sheikh Mohammed, racing's most powerful owner, threatens to remove his horses from Britain.*

Their sole concern is to squeeze every last penny for their own purely selfish interests. *The Sheikh on the bookmakers.*

My Mum set five or six chapels ablaze because she lit so many candles for me. Maybe now she'll shut up about me getting a proper job. *Ken Doherty, after beating Stephen Hendry to become world snooker champion.*

I don't know why I do so well abroad. Perhaps it's because there's not much else to do and you can't rip out to the bookies to back three doubles and a treble at Fontwell. *John Parrott at the German Open.*

My son was sat having his breakfast the other day and he said, "You'll be finished by tomorrow, won't you daddy, because you just play, lose and come home". *Steve Davis reveals the motivational secret behind his victory in the Benson and Hedges Masters final.*

It felt like someone was stubbing a burning cigarette in my back for an hour and a half. *Chris Boardman after a 33-mile time-trial the day before he pulled out.*

It's a rather strange sensation slicing away at yourself with a scalpel. *Pete Gooss, competitor in the Vendée Globe yacht race, who operated on his two hernias at sea.*

It was like a shadow going past. *LZ McCoolgan, beaten by one second in the London Marathon by Joyce Chapchumba.*

Speed skating is like: water beetles on a shirley. *Goro Yoshimura, mayor of Nagano, scene of the 1998 Winter Olympics.*

Compiled by Chris Maume

21/RACING

critics

KEMPTON

12.40 Zaratista
1.10 Fiddling The Facts
1.45 Sarnus

HYPERION
2.20 Suny Bay
2.55 Lake Kariba
3.25 Friendship

GOING: Good to Soft.
● Right-hand turn. Practically flat. Run-in of 200yd.
● Course is on A308 at Sandbury (Blue line from Richmond Underground station). AD-
mission: Adults 10 to 25 pence (10 to 25 pence); Children 5 to 10 pence (5 to 10 pence).
● LEADING TRAINERS: 10 winners from 69 runners gives a success rate of 14.5%.
● LEADING JOCKEYS: A Maguire 25 wins from 95 rides gives a success rate of 26.3%.
● LEADING HORSES: 10 winners from 100 rides gives a success rate of 10%.
● FAVOURITES: 17 winners in 288 races (40%).
● BLINKERED FIRST TIME: None.

12.40 PERTEMPS CATERING NOVICE HURDLE (CLASS B)
£10,000 added 2m Penalty Value £5,938

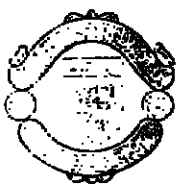
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PREMIERSHIP HALF-TERM REPORT

With the League campaign having reached the half-way point, *Independent* writers assess the performances of the 20 teams so far, while Football Correspondent Glenn Moore offers a finishing order come May

1ST MAN UNITED

Teddy Sheringham's penalties are dreadful and Ryan Giggs' crosses can suggest he has donned the wrong highly sponsored boots, but we are talking degrees of perfection here. Not since Liverpool in the Seventies and Eighties has a team looked so comfortable with their ability.



Nine points better off than they were this time last season, Alex Ferguson's assertion that the Premiership does not start until January 1 is ringing a little hollow as everyone else thinks the race is all but over by Christmas. To paraphrase the United manager, it will take a collapse of Devon Loch proportions to stop them now.

The key to the team is not so much their attacking threat, although heaven knows they have enough, but their solidity. When do Denis Irwin, Henning Berg, the Nevilles and Nicky Butt have bad matches? Hardly ever and they hold things together when the party pieces up front do not come off. Titles are won with 1-0 wins against Southampton.

Star pupil: Peter Schmeichel.
Must do better: How?

2ND CHELSEA

In another year the ground will be finished, the team are even closer. Both already tantalised with potential, Ken Bates deserves credit for the ground - though he could not resist his unnecessary attack on Matthew Harding - and Ruud Gullit for the team, notably how he has instilled the squad system in a club of stars.



They may have lost too many games to win the league, usually with flat away days, but they are a cup threat in Europe and at home. The side are attractive to watch but have displayed the necessary edge when ruffled.

Among the highly priced imports some young talent has been given its chance with Nick Crittenden the sixth English teenager to play under Gullit.

The FA Cup meeting with Manchester United is a titanic game. Chelsea are well capable of beating United over one match, had Gustavo Poyet not been injured they would push them close over the long haul too.

Star pupil: Dan Petrescu.
Must do better: Until November Zola, De Goey and Le Saux under par, but all now in form.

3RD BLACKBURN

Not many managers could sell £13m worth of defenders and end up with a better team, but Roy Hodgson has managed it and Blackburn have every reason for optimism in 1998. "We feel we are going to win every time we go the pitch," Stuart Ripley says.



They usually do, too, thanks to solidity rather than extravagant flair and it will take a talented side to finish above them this season. Unfortunately for Hodgson a very good team hold a four-point advantage that is unlikely to be eroded.

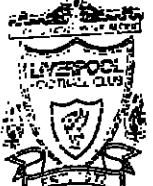
The only criticism you can level at Hodgson is that he might have bought too hastily because he has brought seven players to Ewood and only Stéphane Henchoz turns out regularly for the first team. It takes a strong personality to realise your errors, however, and the new manager is certainly that.

Second place in the Premiership is within their capabilities and, who knows, the FA Cup. Just the former would make it a splendid return for a manager in his first season.

Star pupil: Stuart Ripley.
Must do better: Garry Flitcroft.

4TH LIVERPOOL

Most teams, with the arguable exception of Manchester United, are invariably two players short of where they want to be. By signing Paul Ince and Karlheinz Riedle, Liverpool must have thought they had found the missing links. It has proved an exercise in self-delusion, for it left the weaknesses in goal and in central defence unaddressed.



Ince has failed, in any case, to have quite the anticipated impact: the Kop awaits more meaningful signs of his commitment than the theatrically kissing the badge. With his suspension, running parallel to a ban on Robbie Fowler and home humiliations by Barnsley and United, it was not surprising that Roy Evans' job was again the subject of dark speculation.

Consistency remains elusive; one cannot help but wonder what Steve McManaman might be achieving under Messrs Ferguson and Kidd. Still, Evans' move for Brad Friedel shows an awareness of the problems, and Michael Owens' impact, at barely 18, has been a real bonus.

Star pupils: Michael Owen, Jamie Redknapp.
Must do better: David James, Paul Ince.

5TH ARSENAL

When they took up temporary tenure of the Premiership's top flat in early autumn it was fashionable to see Arsenal as Manchester United's most serious challengers. Ian Wright was setting records, Dennis Bergkamp setting new standards and Arsène Wenger's remodelled side setting the division alight.



As the nights grew longer, however, so did Arsenal's sick list and the disciplinary points tally. In November Les poulets came home to roost and in November Les poulets came home to roost. A seriously under-strength first-team squad was rudely exposed by the absences of Bergkamp, Vieira and Petit - while the ever-perverse Wright managed to go missing despite playing in the side. Now, even with the significant sentences back, the north Londoners have failed to re-establish their early momentum.

For all his summer activity Wenger has not replaced ageing full-backs, and few recent purchases appear ready to push for first-team places, which only makes the sale of Paul Merson all the more questionable.

Star pupil: Bergkamp.
Must do better: Wright and Overmars.

6TH NEWCASTLE UTD

Just like last season, when they thrashed Manchester United 5-0 in October, Newcastle look to have peaked prematurely once again. The September beating of Barcelona already seems a distant memory. The conquerors of the Catalans have been playing true to their present station: a middle order Premiership team.



The absence of Alan Shearer has had much to do with the middling state of affairs at St James' Park. Since Faustino Asprilla's stomach injury, and subsequent struggle to regain match fitness, Newcastle have played like a team without a focal point. Their defence has looked less suspect when the inspirational Stuart Pearce and the assured Alessandro Pistone have been fit to play; Newcastle's form dipped markedly when both were out injured.

A fit Shearer and a late charge like last season's will be required to put the Magpies in the frame for a UEFA Cup place.

Star pupil: Alessandro Pistone.
Must do better: Jon Dahl Tomasson.

7TH LEEDS UNITED

The transformation of Leeds has taken everyone, perhaps including George Graham, by surprise. The manager's determination to offload the high-earning low achievers he inherited from Howard Wilkinson - initially seen as vindictiveness - has been vindicated.



Suddenly it was Graham's team and one which, despite the evidence of Stamford Bridge, actually tries to win games rather than making 0-0 their sole aim. While Nigel Martyn has been patchy in goal by last season's standards, the rejuvenation of Rod Wallace and a midfield no longer staffed by defenders have more than compensated. The Australian teenager Harry Kewell has been a real find, too, his mobility helping dangerous counter-attacking options.

Graham knows, however, that spirit and organisation can take them only so far. To become genuine contenders, they still need two or three "special players", as he puts it. But the arrival of highly paid stars could jeopardise present camaraderie.

Star pupils: Lucas Radebe, Harry Kewell.
Must do better: David Robertson.

8TH DERBY COUNTY

Generally formidable at their new home, often feeble away, Derby's overall performance to date must nevertheless have exceeded expectations. For such a polyglot team, brimming with Estonians and Scots, Costa Ricans and Croats, Danes and Jamaicans, they have gelled surprisingly quickly.

Moreover, they have maintained upward mobility (it is only 18 months since a surprising promotion) despite being without defensive linchpin Igor Simac for long periods. Although the strikers, Paolo Wanchope and Dean Sturridge, have done well, one wickedly unpredictable and the other with pace to burn, the pivotal figure has been Francesco Baiano.

Many clubs use a clever, mobile forward in "the hole". Few perform there as well as Baiano, Jim Smith's recruit from Fiorentina. With Leicester's resilience, especially when defending a lead away, they would be a fair bet for Europe, but then their East Midlands rivals do not have their panache.

Star pupils: Paolo Wanchope, Francesco Baiano.
Must do better: Darryl Powell, Jonathan Hunt.

9TH WEST HAM UTD

Happy at home, hopeless away, West Ham's wildly erratic form mirrors that of Leeds' last season. It is a dilemma Harry Redknapp must resolve if the Hammers are to achieve a finish in the top half of the Premiership, which has become a realistic goal for them.



Fortress Upton Park certainly possesses in John Harrison and Paul Kitson - shrewd purchases both - fearsome forward power while the club's back line of the precocious Rio Ferdinand, Ian Pearce and David Unsworth - the youngest in the élite - is steadily growing in stature.

Eyal Berkovitch is the player who makes the Hammers tick, however, and the little Israeli's purchase from Southampton in the close season shows that Redknapp now has a shrewd eye for a bargain. Yet the nagging doubt remains that West Ham need another couple of additions to the squad before they can travel in style.

Star pupils: Harrison and Berkovitch.
Must do better: Steve Lomas.

10TH ASTON VILLA

Puzzlingly, there have been two Villas so far: the team who have turned on the passion and the patience as required en route to the last eight of the UEFA Cup; and the pallid bunch who effectively blew their championship chances by losing the first four matches. Europe, and perhaps the FA Cup, will keep interest alive, but after successive top-five finishes, Doug Ellis, Brian Little and a record number of season-ticket holders expected more. For all the manager's loyalty towards his £10.5m front players, the problem lies with Stan Collymore and Savo Micevic. A single loose cannon would be one too many at Old Trafford, yet Villa have two and have had to deploy Dwight Yorke out of position to accommodate them.



One fears it will all end in tears (or at Molineux) for the strangely lethargic Collymore, but a backbone of players like Mark Bosnich, Gareth Southgate, Steve Staunton, Mark Draper and the underrated Ian Taylor should ensure they finish nearer the top than the bottom.

Star pupils: Steve Staunton, Ian Taylor.
Must do better: Stan Collymore.

11TH WIMBLEDON

This time last year they were 20-odd games unbeaten and dreaming of Wembley and Europe. They are still performing creditably, especially in comparison to such alleged giants as Everton and Spurs, but there is now a shadow over the club.



The Norwegian investment, and further rumours of a move to Dublin, have left manager Joe Kinnear uncertain of his position and the fans fearful of the future. At least there now appears a dialogue with Merton Council but much is shrouded in doubt. One wonders if Kinnear is keeping an eye on events at White Hart Lane.

On the pitch injuries, and the loss of Oyvind Leonhardsen, have weakened the side but the emergence of Carl Cort has provided a counter-balance. Robbie Earle has been pre-occupied with Jamaica but, with a World Cup in his sights, may recover his best form to give the club a timely lift.

Star pupil: Carl Cort.
Must do better: Robbie Earle.

12TH TOTTENHAM

Jürgen is back and, suddenly, there is a rosy hue over White Hart Lane. One man maketh not a team but Tottenham have better players than their position indicates and Klinsmann should be the catalyst to steer them away from relegation. It is not just his quality as his application which should be influential.



In 1977 Tottenham's team included Glenn Hoddle, Steve Perryman and Pat Jennings but they were not too good to go down. Neither, unless they are prepared to marry perspiration with inspiration, are the present side.

Darren Anderton's return from injury is also important as Christian Gross attempts to reverse the tendency to fall away in the second half through intensive training. Klinsmann's preparedness to work on his game should set the right example. If David Ginola is prepared to follow suit the early belief that he may be part of the solution, not the problem, should be justified.

Star pupils: Sol Campbell, David Ginola.
Must do better: Everyone else.

13TH LEICESTER CITY

The fixture computer dealt Leicester such an arduous start (their first four games were against members of last season's top five) that they could easily have been bottom come autumn. Instead they were looking down on many more expensively constructed sides as Martin O'Neill recited his mantra: "That's another three points towards avoiding relegation."



Despite a lack of genuine quality they remain the division's hardest-working team. Few others would have equalised in stoppage time as they did against Crystal Palace this month. Of course it is not all graft: Matt Elliott, barely a year after graduating from Oxford, is the most rugged and refined of centre-backs, while Muzzy Izet is blossoming into a midfielder with quick feet and a sharp brain.

But there have been signs of late that a rather one-dimensional style has been nipped. And how long before O'Neill, the brightest manager of his generation, tires of the bargain basement and takes on a Tottenham or an Everton?

Star pupils: Matt Elliott, Muzzy Izet.
Must do better: Steve Claridge, Rob Savage.

14TH SOUTHAMPTON

While a good season for Southampton is one in which they avoid relegation, their manager Dave Jones arrived in the summer with higher expectations. The half-term situation sees both Saints and Jones making slow progress.



An injury crisis, combined with some typically abysmal defending, saw Saints at the bottom after two months, but some inspired, even brave, purchases by the budget-restrained Jones (of Carlton Palmer and David Hirst) paid off and a late autumn rally appeared to signal a renaissance at The Dell.

But while Palmer and Hirst added experience to a side with powerful attacking potential (Kevin Davies and Egil Olsenstad), too often the distracted natures of some (Matt Le Tissier) and incompetence of several others (most of the defenders) have cost the Saints dear. If signs of a tighter back four turn into a more tangible impregnability, the annual spring struggle may yet be avoided.

Star pupils: Kevin Davies, Paul Jones.
Must do better: Matt Le Tissier.

15TH CRYSTAL PALACE

Considering they were everyone's favourites for relegation, Palace will be more than satisfied with 13th place at this stage. Earning promotion via the play-offs meant that Steve Coppell had less time to strengthen his squad in the summer than other Premiership managers. The rebuilding work has continued through the season and has not been helped by several injuries.



Neil Shipperley, who initially lost his place, has surprised many with his good form of late, but Palace have lacked penetration in attack when Bruce Dyer has been injured. Coppell will also be hoping that his Italians, Attilio Lombardo and Michele Padovano, recover fitness quickly.

Well organised at the back, Palace have defended well as a team and have been at their best when counter-attacking. Eighteen of their 21 points have been won in away matches - only Chelsea have earned more from their travels - but with 11 of their last 19 matches at Selhurst Park the key to survival will be their home form.

Star pupil: Andy Roberts.
Must do better: Yitzak Zohar.

16TH EVERTON

Where do you begin to put things right? Howard Kendall is one of the great Everton managers and he does not seem to know and, short of a vast amount of money that does not seem to be forthcoming, the prospects are bleak.



So-so players have been bought instead of true quality, partly because the Les Ferdinands of this world would not touch the perpetually troubled club.

The end product is a midfield which cannot create and a strike-force that cannot score and the team's only redeeming quality is their ability to fight which is admirable in Barnsley, but lamentable for a club of Everton's prestige.

Kendall says there are some good youngsters within Goodison, the most forward of which is Danny Cadamarteri, and the future is bright. But that does not help the present. Alan Hansen famously said you do not win titles with kids; with luck Everton will not get the chance to prove him wrong in the First Division next season.

Star pupil: Gary Speed.
Must do better: Duncan Ferguson.

17TH SHEFFIELD WED

What a difference one man makes. Or does he? On the face of it David has been eclipsed by the Goliath personality of Ron Atkinson but erstwhile manager Pleat always said they would be a different team with a captain and a centre-forward.



Trying to assess Wednesday is like trying to work out whether Pleat was a victim of his own decisions or bad timing. Good or bad, they can move seamlessly between extremes and it is entirely in keeping with their character that they should follow four wins with successive defeats.

Paolo Di Canio is the embodiment of their unpredictability. A lethal goalscorer one moment, an over-elaborate squanderer of possession the next, he both inspires and infuriates. Whether he and Benito Carbone can thrive in the same team is a problem Atkinson has to deal with.

They might win the FA Cup, they could get relegated but you can hardly accuse Wednesday of being boring. No club is when Big Ron is around.

Star pupil: Paolo Di Canio.
Must do better: Paolo Di Canio.

18TH COVENTRY CITY

Each summer, when others scan the new fixtures to see who they play first, Sky Blues fans instinctively look to the last game. This time, intriguingly, it's Everton away. Notwithstanding an escape act honed to perfection over three decades, there are signs that this really could be the year Coventry take the drop.



Cruelly for Gordon Strachan, injury has robbed him of Gary McAllister's class and leadership just as games with Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal et al are looming. The signing of George Boateng, from Feyenoord, and the return of Noel Whelan should help tide them over until the captain's return, but by February the damage could be done.

Despite having the beleaguered Geoffrey Robinson as a benefactor, a succession of managers at Highfield Road have recruited on the cheap. The acquisition of McAllister, Whelan and Dion Dublin bucked the trend, but they still have too many journeymen. Giving Strachan a contract until 2002 was also tempting fate.

Star pupil: Gary McAllister.
Must do better: John Salako.

19TH BOLTON W'ERS

Nothing illustrates the gap between the First Division and the Premiership better than Bolton. Cavaliers last year with 100 League goals, they have become skinflints, scoring and conceding 14 goals, by far the fewest.



Getting walloped week after week two years ago has not allowed players to shed inhibitions, the experience still looms large in their psyche. Safety-first is both their objective and their attitude.

Nevertheless this team of roundheads has its merits, not least Scott Sellars, who recalls the age of the inside-forward. Now approaching the speed of Pat Crerand, he provides an endless supply of imagination from the left flank which, when you watch Newcastle these days, makes it all the more puzzling why Kevin Keegan let him go.

Only if the relegation battle has been won, are we likely to see Bolton fully off the leash. Unfortunately, that is unlikely to happen.

Star pupil: Scott Sellars.
Must do better: Dean Holdsworth.

20TH BARNSELY

Be careful with your dreams, they might come true. A century of craving to be in the top division was satisfied last May and reality has trampled the idyll ever since.



Their fans say they resemble Brazil but a better comparison is Wimbledon. Like Joe Kinnear's team they run United drop, but unlike the masters they have not had the years of practice or the youth production line. Even so Neil Redfern has had the sort of 1997 that more renowned midfielders would find impossible to emulate. A strong tackler and a tute passer, he scored 19 times last season, eight this time in a struggling team.

You cannot imagine Barnsley escaping relegation but one result will sustain Oakwell through its disappointment: Liverpool 0, Barnsley 1. You can endure a lot after that.

Star pupil: Neil Redfern.
Must do better: Gorgi Hristov.

Reports written by Glenn Moore, Phil Shaw, Guy Hodgson, Paul Newman, Matt Tatch, Simon Turnbull, Andrew Martin and Nick Harris.

My father's exclamation on a holy day justified booking for blasphemy

One of the things on which old British footballers are in agreement is that today's heroes have got no cause to complain about the restrictions imposed on them at Christmas.

They remember 11am kick-offs on Christmas morning; long, jolting journeys on steam trains to fulfil Boxing Day fixtures; the draughty waiting rooms of deserted stations; nursing injuries in heatless carriages; dry, curled up sandwiches. Happy Christmas—they had to be kidding.

George Cohen, who turned out for England in the 1966 World Cup final, recalls travelling back from Swansea on Christmas Day with Fulham. "You can fly as far as Los Angeles in the time it took us to get

home from Wales," he said. "Teams travelled by rail in those days and there was only a skeleton service over the holiday period."

Finally getting to bed in the early hours, the team had to play again that afternoon. "I don't remember how things went at Swansea but I haven't forgotten the journey," Cohen, now a property dealer in Kent, said. "We were stuck at Bridgford for six hours with nothing to eat or drink, trying to fan some warmth from a miserable coal fire in the waiting room. I looked at Johnny Haynes, who was then captain of England, and thought the whole thing was bloody ridiculous."

Witless administration that had yet to see the sense of arranging

derby matches over Christmas meant that teams covered hundreds of miles to play each other twice in 24 hours. Some of the results seemed ridiculous, too. Walsley at home; victors away.

On Boxing Day 1963, less than six months before defeating Preston North End in the FA Cup final, West Ham lost 8-2 at home to Blackburn Rovers. Two days later, showing one change, Eddie Bovington for Martin Peters, they won 3-1 at Blackburn. Peters would play a significant role in England's World Cup victory but the turnaround against Blackburn cost him an FA Cup winner's medal, through being unable to regain his place until the following season.

Tottenham's 4-1 home loss to



KEN JONES

West Ham on Boxing Day 1958, their second on a congested Christmas programme, made relegation a serious possibility just two seasons before they became the first modern Double winners. Sitting at the

back of the directors' box, Tottenham's manager, Bill Nicholson, heard a reporter declare that a club with such poor parking facilities deserved to be in the Second Division.

I reminded Nicholson of this many years later. "I was angry because it was such a stupid remark," he said, "but those Christmas results proved that we were in real trouble. Something had to be done."

Relegation was avoided but not before Nicholson took the sensational step of leaving out Danny Blanchflower, who spent a month in the reserves.

Old players speak not only of chaotic Christmas arrangements but some lively souls who turned out with hangers. A personal favourite

among anecdotes concerns a normally abstemious winger whose equilibrium was greatly affected by the drinks he was persuaded to take on Christmas Eve. On the field next morning, fearful of being found out, he begged not to be given the ball. When his centre in the final minute led to an own goal that won the match, still unable to distinguish clearly between his own team and the opposition, he trotted over and congratulated the culprit. A punch, unseen by the referee, left him flattened in the back of the net.

Cautions were rare in those days but swearing in the carshot of referees on Christmas Day was not advisable, as my father learned in a match controlled by Stanley Rous,

later Sir Stanley, who went on to become an automatic secretary of the Football Association and president of Fifa, the game's ruling body. In Rous's view my father's exclamation of "Jesus Christ" on a holy day justified booking for blasphemy.

The sound of supporters tramping to matches on Christmas Day morning has long gone from English football. The majority today are astonished to hear of it happening. As for the players, the worst they can expect is a training session and travel in luxury buses. Pressure, strain, absence from their families? Forget it. They should have been around 30 years ago, when the bonus was two pounds for a win and a pound for a draw: the rent money.

Conference remains to confound Sir John

Sir John Hall may not be bowled over by the format governing Continental club rugby, but the Newcastle tycoon's opinions clearly carry little weight where it matters most—in the boardroom of European Rugby Cup Ltd.

As Chris Hewett reports, the decision to run both European competitions again next season means Sir John will have to put up or shut up.

European rugby is either manna from heaven or a sharp poke in the bank account, depending on the tournament in which a club finds itself competing. Quality for the Heineken Cup and you guarantee yourself at least six weeks of glitzy, glamorous and generally lucrative exposure. Slum it in the European Conference and you can kiss a fond farewell to a month and a half of Premiership or top league action and take on humungous attractions like Padova, Farul Constanta and the Dutch national team instead.

Club rugby in the northern hemisphere so favours the haves over the have-nots that it is something of a shock to discover that the directors of ERC Ltd, the organising body of the two existing cross-border tournaments, do not include Baroness Thatcher among their number. There have been moans and whinges about the unfairness of it all, but, as a result of last Friday's get-together in Dublin, the competitions will proceed next year along broadly the same lines as this season.

The news will not please those English clubs who have been bellyaching about their

lack of meaningful rugby during the recent domestic hiatus, although they will presumably be more than happy to hitch a ride on the Heineken gravy train should they happen to be in the top four of the Allied Dunbar Premiership come the middle of May. A number of big-spending sides—Newcastle, Saracens, Richmond—declared themselves thoroughly chuffed off with backwater life in the unsponsored second-string Conference competition, to the extent that Sir John Hall, self-styled king of the Georgies, called for its abolition even as his side was battling away in last Saturday's semi-final against Agen. No chance of that, it seems. The 12-strong ERC board have given the green light to another 32-team Conference next season and if Newcastle fail to make the Heineken cut, they will be involved. Unless, of course, Sir John takes his ball home and scratches from the tournament, a move that would leave his side with no one at all to play against, not even the Dutch.

Only two significant changes have been made to the competition formats. The Heineken, in which home and away pool games will be played in two blocks to allow for a fortnight of World Cup qualifying activity, will not feature a quarter-final play-off phase; the last eight will feature the five winners of the four-team groups plus the three best runners-up. The Conference, meanwhile, will contain only a dozen French teams—there were 16 this season—and that creates space for four fledgling national sides. Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain and Portugal are among the possible starters.

Meanwhile Gloucester, one of England's more enthusiastic Conference competitors, were busy on the transfer front yesterday. The West Countrymen

were expected to complete the signing of Brian Johnson, the England A wing who captains the Army and scored 27 league and cup tries for Newbury last season, and were simultaneously pushing hard for the services of Steve Ojomoh, the former England loose forward transferred by Bath earlier this month. Johnson, whose pace made him a target for a number of Premiership clubs, was thought to have agreed a professional deal under which his military career could be kept on hold. Ojomoh, meanwhile, was being pursued as a natural back-row replacement for Ed Pearce, who undergoes groin surgery next month and will not return until mid-April.

Saracens, the Premiership leaders, go into their important Boxing Day match with Leicester at Vicarage Road without Richard Hill, their versatile England back-rower. Hill is suffering from a hamstring injury so Alex Bennett, a signing from Orrell, completes the breakaway trio alongside Francois Pienaar and Tony Diprose.

Wasps have two England internationals, Will Green and Simon Shaw, back in their tight five for Saturday's visit to Northampton while Bath also make changes for their awkward trip to Sale. Jon Callard, whose five penalties guided the club to victory over Pau in last weekend's Heineken Cup semi-final, gives way to Matt Perry at full-back while Mike Catt moves to centre to allow the transfer-listed Richard Butler a run at stand-off. Up front, John Mallet replaces Victor Uboegbu on the tight head and Brian Cusack replaces German Llanes in the second row.

The former International Rugby Board secretary, Keith Rowlands, has been appointed chief executive for the 1999 World Cup.



Jimmy Johnson, the Miami Dolphins coach, reacts to a controversial call that went against his team on a two-point conversion late in Monday night's game against the New England Patriots. Miami lost the match 14-12, a result that gave the Patriots the AFC East title. They now play host to the Dolphins in next week's wild card game. Photograph: AP

RUGBY LEAGUE

Sculthorpe joins Saints for record fee

Paul Sculthorpe, the 20-year-old Great Britain loose forward, became the most expensive feared in the game when he sealed his £370,000 move to Saint Helens yesterday.

Saints agreed to pay £300,000 in cash and part with the £70,000-rated Welsh international forward Chris Morley to Warrington to complete the transfer.

St Helens already possess the costliest back in Paul Newlove—he joined them in a £500,000 cash-plus-players deal two years ago—and exceeded the £250,000 Leeds paid Wigan for Ellery Hanley in 1991 to land Sculthorpe.

The Saints coach, Shaun McKee, said: "At the moment, for his age, you have got to say he is one of the best players in the world."

Oldham have paid an undisclosed fee to Rochdale to sign their former captain Neil Flanagan, 27, a scrum-half who also played for Huddersfield. David Mycock and Alex Thompson have left Sheffield after failing to agree terms with the club.

CRICKET

New Zealand power through to semi-final against England

The England women's team will face New Zealand in their World Cup semi-final in Madras on Boxing Day after the Kiwis made a mess of Irish hopes of a place in the last four. The New Zealanders overran Ireland by 139 runs in Bombay yesterday.

New Zealand, who won the toss and elected to bat, were given a solid start by their openers, Debbie Hockley, who scored 70, and Emily Drumm, who made 60.

They put on 121 and, in the event, the Kiwis could have stopped there. They went on to make 244 for 3 from their 50 overs and then restricted Ireland to 105 for 9 off theirs.

The difference between the sides was as clear in the field as it was at the crease. The Irish bowlers contributed 21 wickets to an extras tally of 35, but the New Zealanders fielded brilliantly, throwing themselves around in their determination to put pressure on the Irish batting. Only three of the Irish made double figures. Adele Spence top-scored with 18 runs off 35 balls.

Australia, the only team to beat England so far in the tournament, play India in the

other semi-final in Gauhati today.

New Zealand won toss
NEW ZEALAND
D Hockley c McDonald b Shillington... 70
E Drumm b Beggs... 60
S Pryn b McDonald... 33
K Wilkes not out... 32
M Lewis not out... 14
Extras (60 80 21w 1nb)... 35
Total (for 5, 50 overs)... 244
Ireland: 105 for 9 (50 overs)
Fall: 1-25, 3-25, 4-35, 5-57, 6-58, 7-57, 8-70, 9-71
Bowling: Wilkes 8-2-14; Shillington 7-4-18; Beggs 9-3-22; Campbell 6-2-5; Hockley 8-3-51; Rams 8-0-26; Hockley 4-2-4-0
New Zealand beat Ireland by 139 runs.

● Graham Napier, the Essex all-rounder, produced a fine spell of in-swinging bowling in Port Elizabeth to take four wickets in 15 balls and lead England Under-19 to victory by 47 runs over South African Schools, who collapsed from 190 for 4 to 221 all out.

BOXING DAY FIXTURE GUIDE

| Football | |
|----------------------------|--|
| FA CUP | 1 Arsenal v Liverpool (12.0) |
| FA CUP | 2 Bolton v Barnsley (12.0) |
| FA CUP | 3 Coventry v Manchester United (12.0) |
| FA CUP | 4 Everton v Arsenal (12.0) |
| FA CUP | 5 Derby v Newcastle (12.0) |
| FA CUP | 6 Liverpool v Leeds (12.0) |
| FA CUP | 7 Manchester United v Everton (12.0) |
| FA CUP | 8 Sheffield Wednesday v Blackburn (12.0) |
| FA CUP | 9 West Ham v Coventry (12.0) |
| NATIONWIDE FOOTBALL LEAGUE | |
| First Division | 10 Charlton v Norwich (12.0) |
| First Division | 11 Crewe v Manchester City (12.0) |
| First Division | 12 Huddersfield v Middlesbrough (12.0) |
| First Division | 13 Ipswich v Birmingham (12.0) |
| First Division | 14 Nottingham Forest v Swindon (12.0) |
| First Division | 15 Reading v Walsley (12.0) |
| First Division | 16 Stockport v Port Vale (12.0) |
| First Division | 17 Stoke v Sheffield Wednesday (12.0) |
| First Division | 18 Sunderland v Bradford City (12.0) |
| First Division | 19 Tranmere v Bury (12.0) |
| First Division | 20 Wolves v Oxford United (12.0) |
| Second Division | 21 Bournemouth v Gillingham (12.0) |
| Second Division | 22 Brentford v Southend (12.0) |
| Second Division | 23 Bristol City v Millwall (12.0) |
| Second Division | 24 Burnley v Chesterfield (12.0) |
| Second Division | 25 Carlisle v Blackpool (12.0) |
| Second Division | 26 Luton v Northampton (12.0) |
| Second Division | 27 Plymouth v Fulham (12.0) |
| Second Division | 28 Preston v Oldham (12.0) |
| Second Division | 29 Walsley v Bristol Rovers (12.0) |
| Second Division | 30 Wrexham v Wigan (12.0) |
| Second Division | 31 Wycombe v Watford (12.0) |
| Second Division | 32 York v Grimsby (12.0) |
| Rugby Union | |
| FA Cup | 1 Arsenal v Liverpool (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 2 Bolton v Barnsley (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 3 Coventry v Manchester United (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 4 Everton v Arsenal (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 5 Derby v Newcastle (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 6 Liverpool v Leeds (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 7 Manchester United v Everton (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 8 Sheffield Wednesday v Blackburn (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 9 West Ham v Coventry (12.0) |
| Ice Hockey | |
| FA Cup | 1 Arsenal v Liverpool (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 2 Bolton v Barnsley (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 3 Coventry v Manchester United (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 4 Everton v Arsenal (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 5 Derby v Newcastle (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 6 Liverpool v Leeds (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 7 Manchester United v Everton (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 8 Sheffield Wednesday v Blackburn (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 9 West Ham v Coventry (12.0) |

HOLIDAY FIXTURES AND POOLS GUIDE

| Boxing Day | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| FA Cup | 1 Arsenal v Liverpool (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 2 Bolton v Barnsley (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 3 Coventry v Manchester United (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 4 Everton v Arsenal (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 5 Derby v Newcastle (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 6 Liverpool v Leeds (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 7 Manchester United v Everton (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 8 Sheffield Wednesday v Blackburn (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 9 West Ham v Coventry (12.0) |
| Sunday 28 December | |
| FA Cup | 1 Arsenal v Liverpool (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 2 Bolton v Barnsley (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 3 Coventry v Manchester United (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 4 Everton v Arsenal (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 5 Derby v Newcastle (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 6 Liverpool v Leeds (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 7 Manchester United v Everton (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 8 Sheffield Wednesday v Blackburn (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 9 West Ham v Coventry (12.0) |
| Second Division | |
| 10 Charlton v Norwich | 11 Crewe v Manchester City |
| 12 Huddersfield v Middlesbrough | 13 Ipswich v Birmingham |
| 14 Nottingham Forest v Swindon | 15 Reading v Walsley |
| 16 Stockport v Port Vale | 17 Stoke v Sheffield Wednesday |
| 18 Sunderland v Bradford City | 19 Tranmere v Bury |
| 20 Wolves v Oxford United | |
| Third Division | |
| 21 Bournemouth v Gillingham | 22 Brentford v Southend |
| 23 Bristol City v Millwall | 24 Burnley v Chesterfield |
| 25 Carlisle v Blackpool | 26 Luton v Northampton |
| 27 Plymouth v Fulham | 28 Preston v Oldham |
| 29 Walsley v Bristol Rovers | 30 Wrexham v Wigan |
| 31 Wycombe v Watford | 32 York v Grimsby |
| Saturday 27 December | |
| FA Cup | 1 Arsenal v Liverpool (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 2 Bolton v Barnsley (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 3 Coventry v Manchester United (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 4 Everton v Arsenal (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 5 Derby v Newcastle (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 6 Liverpool v Leeds (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 7 Manchester United v Everton (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 8 Sheffield Wednesday v Blackburn (12.0) |
| FA Cup | 9 West Ham v Coventry (12.0) |

SPORTING DIGEST

MOTOR RACING

China ready for F1 grand prix

China could stage a Formula One grand prix next year at a new track in the southern city of Zhuhai, according to reports in Hong Kong.

The reports indicate that the circuit is one of two reserve venues for the 1998 World Championship if either Belgium or Portugal should lose their

status. Kyalami, in South Africa, is the other track on stand-by.

"We are ready to hold a Formula One race and the circuit is up to standard. All the facilities are ready. We are very optimistic about our chances," Joe Lim Hui-beng, a director of the Zhuhai Circuit, told the South China Morning Post.

Basketball

China ready for F1 grand prix

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Cycling

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Football

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Ice skating

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Tennis

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Speed skating

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THE INDEPENDENT
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| EASTERN CONFERENCE | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Atlanta Division | |
| Miami | 17 8 680 |
| Orlando | 16 11 583 |
| New York | 15 11 552 |
| New Jersey | 14 11 580 |
| Washington | 14 14 500 |
| Boston | 12 50 414 |
| Philadelphia | 9 24 411 |
| Central Division | |
| Atlanta | 19 1 PCT 68 |
| Indiana | 18 7 604 |
| Chicago | 17 8 680 |
| Cleveland | 16 9 640 |
| Cleveland | 16 9 640 |
| Charlotte | 16 9 640 |
| Detroit | 15 15 664 |
| Minnesota | 12 14 652 |
| Toronto | 3 24 111 |
| WESTERN CONFERENCE | |
| Mid-West Division | |
| Utah | 16 10 616 |
| Houston | 15 9 609 |
| San Antonio | 15 10 600 |
| Minnesota | 14 14 500 |
| Vancouver | 10 17 370 |
| Dallas | 9 21 362 |
| Denver | 2 22 083 |
| Pacific Division | |
| Seattle | 19 1 PCT 68 |
| LA Lakers | 21 5 676 |
| Phoenix | 18 8 657 |
| Portland | 16 10 583 |
| Sacramento | 10 17 370 |
| Golden State | 9 21 362 |
| LA Clippers | 5 22 083 |
| San Jose | 1 23 085 |

The former Motherwell player, Steve Kirk, has been appointed new manager of Scottish League Second Division side East Fife. The 34-year-old leaves his post as youth development officer at neighbours Raith to return to the club where he started his playing career in 1975. Kirk replaced Jimmy Bony, who left the club earlier this month.

Long-serving players David Mycock and Alex Thompson have left Sheffield after failing to agree terms with the club. Mycock joined the Eagles in 1989 and played 188 times for the club, but his appearances were limited by periods of serious injury. The former Great Britain Under-21 captain Thompson made 47 appearances for the club between spells with Newcastle Knights.

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Tottenham tempted by early taste of Klinsmann factor

The cash registers will be jangling merrily for a Boxing Day programme with a localised flavour. The lolly and the rivalry are all very well, but as Phil Shaw reports, the sideshow of a returning hero could well overshadow the main attractions at the Premiership summit.

Jürgen Klinsmann will be able to exert a Christmas presence for Tottenham Hotspur after all. Alan Sugar, the Spurs chairman, yesterday received international clearance from the Italian FA for his budget-priced signing from Sampdoria, leaving the German captain free to make his second debut for the club at Aston Villa on Boxing Day.

Whether or not Klinsmann plays against Villa depends on whether Spurs' head coach, Christian Gross, considers he is match-fit. Gross may also be reluctant to change the side who beat Barnsley last weekend, while the master striker himself hinted that he might delay his comeback until Sunday's north London derby, saying: "I've never lost to Arsenal, so it will be good to play in that one."

Klinsmann does not have happy memories of Villa Park. Three years ago next month, he was knocked out by a reckless challenge by the home goalkeeper, Mark Bosnich. The incident occurred within an hour of Eric Cantona's violent clash with a spectator at Crystal Palace, making it an evening that should perhaps be immortalised as Kick-Boxing Day.

The temptation to plunge Klinsmann into the fray could be increased by the news that Villa could be without flu victims Gareth Southgate and Steve Staunton. Brian Little, the Villa manager, who has also been suffering from the virus, said: "It's a great move for Spurs. His arrival will really boost them, which we'll have to watch."

Liverpool, having led Manchester United by five points at the same stage last Christmas, go into their home match with Leeds 12 points adrift of the Old Trafford club.

Recent form – apart from aberrations at home to Barnsley and United – offers some encouragement to Roy Evans. Liverpool have won the other six of the last eight matches. And since Tony Yeboah's wondrous winner of two and a half years ago, they have emerged victorious five times and drawn



Christian Gross, Tottenham's Swiss coach, presides over pre-Christmas training yesterday in the knowledge that Jürgen Klinsmann is available to play on Boxing Day

Photograph: Peter Jay

one of the six League and Cup games with Leeds by a margin of 16-0.

Leeds, however, are unbeaten in seven, and the Scrooge-like tendencies for which George Graham's teams are renowned have delivered three consecutive clean sheets. The way they respond to the menace of Messrs McMan-

man, Owen and Fowler will give a strong indication as to whether the spiteful display at Chelsea was a one-off or a taste of things to come.

More than anyone with the possible exception of Liverpool, Barnsley desperately need a point-laden Christmas. They have failed to build on their success at Anfield, prising a solitary

point out of 12 and remaining rooted to the bottom.

Danny Wilson's team face a sell-out match at 17th-placed Bolton knowing that further defensive generosity could leave them trailing their opponents by nine points. History offers them little hope: Nottingham Forest, in last place 12 months back, were still there come May.

For Everton, fresh from their first away win in a year, the computer could scarcely have come up with a more unkind cut than a trip to the champions. After the victory at Leicester, Howard Kendall rejoined in three clean sheets in a row. But Everton need more than mere draws, and with two goals from six games, both penalties, look

unlikely to trouble United unduly.

Blackburn's rise from the relegation zone last December to second place today is a tribute to astute management, by "caretaker" Tony Parkes as well as Roy Hodgson. Rovers have reacted positively to their mauling in Manchester and will be confident of winning at

Sheffield Wednesday. After a bright start under Ron Atkinson, Wednesday have reverted to the feebleness that cost David Pleat his job.

Third-placed Chelsea receive Wimbledon, who make a festive habit of dropping in on the neighbours and making off with the points. All in all, remembering the altercation be-

tween Raul Gullit and Vinnie Jones a couple of Christmases back, it is not the return to Stamford Bridge Chelsea might have wanted after the battle with Leeds, especially in view of their vulnerability against attackers who hustle and play at pace.

Meanwhile, can Boxing Day's traditional knack of producing shock results trick Crystal Palace into winning before their own supporters? Apart from an "away" fixture, with Wimbledon, they have not taken three points at Selhurst Park since April.

The arrival of Southampton, albeit an improving force now that David Hirst and Carlton Palmer have taken some of the strain off Matt Le Tissier, offers the best opportunity so far for a chorus of that seasonal favourite: "Oh what fun it is to see Palace win at home."

England move into top four in the world but Fifa downgrades other British sides

England have jumped to fourth in the end-of-year world rankings issued by football's world governing body, Fifa, yesterday, an improvement of eight places on 12 months ago.

They finished top of their World Cup qualifying group and ahead of Italy, who have also fallen behind England in the new rankings but moved up one place to ninth. Scotland, despite qual-

ifying for France 98, have fallen from 29th to 37th compared to this time last year, while their group opponents next summer, Brazil, are still ranked as the best in the world. Germany are second and the Czech Republic two places higher in third.

The Republic of Ireland have gone down to 47th from 36th; Northern Ireland have slumped from 64th to 93rd and

Wales are 102nd after being 80th last Christmas. Terry Venables' Australia have moved up 15 places to 35th.

Coventry City have signed Viorel Moldovan, on a four and a half year contract worth £4.2m. The Romanian international striker is due to join from the Swiss side Grasshopper on 2 January.

However, Everton have failed

to convince Mickael Madar to join them from Deportivo La Coruña. The 24-year-old French international striker had been expected to sign for the Goodison club yesterday, but he will fly back to Spain today to think further about the move.

West Bromwich Albion will parade Denis Smith as their new manager at a press conference at The Hawthorns today. He has

agreed a three-year contract to take over from Ray Harford.

Crystal Palace have made a bid for Norwich's Welsh Under-21 midfielder Craig Bellamy. Preston have dismissed reports that Ian Rush may replace Gary Peters as manager at Deepdale. The Newcastle striker said last week that this would be his last season in the top flight. Aberdeen's players are un-

der pressure after the manager of the Scottish Premier's bottom club, Alex Miller, said he would listen to offers for any of his squad except his goalkeeper, Jim Leighton, and the new recruit, Derek Whyte.

WORLD RANKINGS (end 1996 in brackets):
1 Brazil (1); 2 Germany (2); 3 Czech Republic (3); 4 England (12); 5 Mexico (11); 6 France (5); 7 Romania (18); 8 Denmark (9); 9 Italy (10); 10 Colombia (4); 11 Scotland (23); 12 Sweden (19); 13 Northern Ireland (64); 14 Wales (102).

BOXING

Holyfield vetoes Lewis fight because \$25m is not enough

Evander Holyfield has pulled out of his proposed undisputed world heavyweight title fight against Britain's Lennox Lewis because he is unhappy with the purse on offer.

Don King, Holyfield's promoter, had reached a provisional agreement with representatives of Lewis, but the fight has been called off following a meeting between Jim Thomas, a lawyer representing the American fighter, and Seth Abraham and Lou DiBiella, of the cable television company Home Box Office.

Thomas said: "We could not come to an agreement and nothing is scheduled. HBO were unwilling to provide sufficient guarantees to assure the fighters of appropriate purses. 'The deal on offer wouldn't have allowed Holyfield to make as much as he did for the recent contest against Michael Moore. I tried as hard as I could to make this fight, but it was simply not possible.'"

The provisional agreement would have provided for purses of \$25m (£15.4m) for Holyfield and \$12m for Lewis.

However, King's cut would have come out of Holyfield's purse.

Holyfield, the World Boxing Association and International Boxing Federation champion, may now defend the WBA title against Britain's Henry Akwande or some of the younger heavyweight contenders.

Lewis, meanwhile, may now turn to a defence of his World Boxing Council title against either Shannon Briggs or the former undisputed world champion, James "Buster" Douglas, who is making a comeback.

— Ken Jones

CRICKET

Selection panel backed beyond millennium

England yesterday consolidated their approach to attempting to improve their international prospects by extending the contracts of their selection panel to the millennium.

The chairman, David Graveney, and selectors Graham Gooch and Mike Gatting, whose agreements with the England and Wales Cricket Board were all due to end prior to the 1999 World Cup but have now been installed beyond that after a unanimous vote of confidence by England's Management Advisory Committee at Lord's yesterday.

It is a further indication of the ECB's policy to maintain continuity both within the in-

ternational team and among the back-up personnel prior to the 1999 World Cup in England.

Separate squads for Tests and one-day internationals have already been identified with Adam Hobbins underlining the wisdom of the policy by leading England to a spectacular Champions' Trophy success in Sharjah last weekend.

The coach, David Lloyd, initially appointed at the start of the 1996 season, has also had his contract extended beyond the World Cup. Physiotherapist Wayne Morton and fitness consultant Dean Riddle complete England's back-room staff.

"We are delighted with the

progress we are making at international level, so it is quite right that we should recognise that progress by rewarding the selectors for their efforts," said Tim Lamb, the ECB's chief executive.

Graveney and Gooch, whose current contracts were due to end in February 1999, have been reappointed for a further six months.

Gooch is due to depart as manager of the A team touring Kenya and Sri Lanka on December 29. Gatting, whose contract ran to February of next year, has been reappointed for a further two years and will coach the A team on the tour.

Happy Christmas Bora



Bora, abandoned in the snow at 9 months, now has a new loving home this Christmas.

As featured on the BBC News (Sunday) and the front page of this newspaper yesterday.

Sadly, there are many children in Albania for whom Christmas is just another day of misery.

Our aim is to provide warm, loving homes for more children before next Christmas.

They desperately need your help.

I would like to give a special present this Christmas to children in Albania of:

\$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$250 Other.....

Please make cheques payable to Hope and Homes for Children or complete the Credit Card details below.

Signature.....

Expiry Date..... (Amex's 4 Digit Code).....

Name.....

Address.....

Telephone..... Post Code.....

Please send me information about your work.

I would like a copy of your free video.

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN

East Cliffe, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP3 4LZ

Tel: 01722 790111. Fax: 01722 790024.

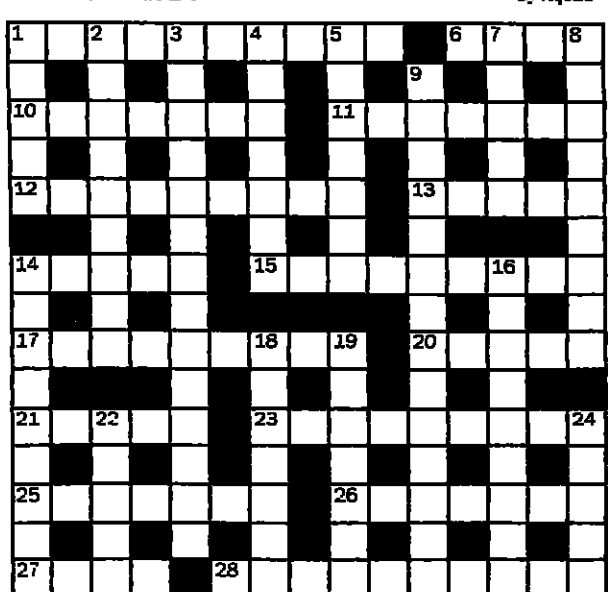
E-mail: hope_and_homes@diapix.com Charity No: 1040535

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3490. Christmas Eve

By Aquila

Thursday's Solution



1 DOWN
2 ACROSS
3 DOWN
4 ACROSS
5 DOWN
6 ACROSS
7 DOWN
8 ACROSS
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10 ACROSS
11 DOWN
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26 ACROSS
27 DOWN
28 ACROSS

ACROSS

- 1 Birth and death of a backbiter? (10)
- 6 Code name for fine linen (4)
- 10 Intended building cafe in east (7)
- 11 Running off irregularly with sweetheart (7)
- 12 Still lesions, unfortunately, round edges of ears (9)
- 13 Dad's army food (5)
- 14 True sound (5)
- 15 Sight of glasses not quite full (9)
- 17 Boss breadman makes me a pastry (9)
- 20 Couples in sandy courses (5)
- 21 Grainless tropic isle? (5)

DOWN

- 1 Small, sprightly German eleven at home (5)
- 2 Drink one at a time, as when winding up (9)
- 3 American intern turns out to be an old hand (7,7)
- 4 This hero uses the maze (7)
- 5 Supervise poetry in Old English (7)

THURSDAY'S SOLUTION

- 1 French mate on board is out of order (5)
- 2 Barred sections of Oregon, as a resettlement? (2,2,5)
- 3 One bearing inwards, say? (8,6)
- 4 Returning standard bill with notes of debts is predatory (9)
- 5 Voice of guerrilla, lot changed? (9)
- 6 State of Mexico that is extremely hot (7)
- 7 Positioned anew – as was Reading, reportedly (2,5)
- 8 Browning's successful examinee? (5)
- 9 American cannon that uses three balls (5)